

Stendhal

ITALIAN CHRONICLES

STENDHAL'S PREFACES



The four prefaces here were not published during Stendhal's lifetime, but they are evidence that he often thought about the possibility of a volume that would collect his various Italian tales and chronicles.

The first preface given here was written by Stendhal on April 24, 1833, as the opening to what he thought would become a collection of Italian stories. The second preface was written on May 16, 1833, another attempt for the same planned collection. The third preface was composed on July 31, 1838, as Stendhal was working on "The Duchess of Palliano." The fourth is undated, but it was written in a notebook that includes a draft of "Too Much Favor Is Deadly," and thus was probably written in the spring of 1839.

Preface

I admit that I have never been particularly curious about how the inhabitants of New Holland¹ act and think, or those of the island of Ceylon. The traveler Franklin reports that among the Riccaras,² the husbands and brothers think it a point of honor to offer their wives and sisters to foreigners. Reading these truthful accounts by Captain Franklin, whom I have met at the home of Monsieur Cuvier, can

amuse me for a quarter of an hour, but very soon I find I am thinking about something else: these Riccaras are simply too different from the men who have been either my friends or my rivals. For the same reason, the heroes of Homer or Racine, the Achilleses and the Agamemnons have always made me yawn. True, many of my contemporary Frenchmen imagine that they love them, because they think that admiring them reflects positively upon themselves; but as for me, I am beginning to shed all the prejudices that were rooted in my early youth.

I love seeing the heart of man depicted—but the heart of the man I know, not that of the Riccaras.

Around the middle of the sixteenth century, vanity, the desire to “create an effect,” as the Baron de Faeneste put it,³ threw a thick veil in France over the actions of men, and even more so over their motives. Vanity has a different character in Italy, and I give my word of honor on this to the reader: it is a much weaker force there. In general, one thinks of one’s neighbor there only to either hate him or despise him; the only exceptions occur during three or four ceremonies per year, and at those a man throwing a fete can mathematically, so to speak, count on the approval of his neighbor. There are none of those little nuances and inferences that go on to make a man deathly uneasy and worried every fifteen minutes of his life. You do not see those anxious, haggard faces produced by an always-wounded, always-suffering vanity, the kind of visages you see in Viennet (the deputy for Hérault in 1833).⁴

This Italian vanity, so different from, so much feebler than ours, is what persuaded me to transcribe the anecdotes that follow. My preferences will seem baroque enough to my French contemporaries, who

are accustomed to seeking their literary pleasures in the kind of depictions of the human heart that appear in the works of Messieurs Villemain, Delavigne, and *****.⁵ I imagine that my contemporaries of 1833 will not be very much moved by the naive and energetic traits to be found in these tales told in the style of gossips. But for me, the narratives of these trials and tortures provide some unimpeachable information on the human heart, information that gives rise to some enjoyable evening meditations now and then. I would much prefer to find stories about love and marriage and shrewd schemes for getting hold of inheritances (like those of the Duke of ***** of 1826), but even when I have found such tales, the iron fist of the justice system not playing any part in them, they have seemed less trustworthy to me. But some good people are working, at this very moment, on further research for me.

What would be needed would be a people among whom the sensations of the moment (as in Naples) or the power of meditated, ruminated passion (as in Rome) would have chased out vanity and affectation. I don't think that one could find outside of Italy (and perhaps Spain, before the affectation of the nineteenth century set in) an epoch that was, in the first place, equally civilized so as to be more interesting than the Riccaras, and, in the second place, equally free of vanity so that the human heart can be viewed almost naked. The one thing I am sure of is that today England, Germany, and France are all too rotten with affectations and vanities, in every area, to be able to cast a light on the human heart in the way these stories can.

Rome, palazzo Cavalieri, twenty-fourth of April 1833.

Preface

The reader will find not carefully composed landscapes here but rather sights taken directly from nature, as if with the English instrument. The truth ought to take precedence over every other kind of merit, but in our time truth is not enough, is not piquant enough. I would advise every person who finds him- or herself partaking of that frame of mind to read one of these stories every week.

I love the style of these stories; it is the style of the people, full of redundancies, and always determined to make the reader know that, when something horrible is named, it truly is horrible. But it is by such means that the narrator, whether intending to do so or not, depicts his century and its ways of thinking.

Most of these stories were written shortly after the death of the poor devils who are their subjects.

I have made a few editorial changes to make the style a little less obscure and to keep the reader from becoming impatient.

Obscurity is the great weakness of the Italian language. The fact is, there are eight or ten Italian languages, and none has succeeded in killing off the others; in France, the language of Paris killed off the language of Montaigne. In Rome, they say, "*Vi vedrò domain all giorno*."⁶ No one in Florence would understand this. I would much rather read a story in English than in Italian; it would be much clearer to me.

The story that has the most piquancy is that of the Massimi, page 16.⁷

I would like to exclude the siege of Genoa, which has no interest beyond ensuring that the entire manuscript given to me has been copied out; I am afraid of being accused of having neglected a
*****.

About a third of these stories are scarcely worth the trouble of copying out, being of the 1600 kind of bad, though this is to my eyes less annoying than the 1833 kind, with quite different kinds of ideas. For example, a Roman prince (Santacroce) comes to believe that his aged mother has a lover, because he has seen her waistline expanding; he believes his honor has been insulted, and he stabs the poor hydropic woman to death. Spanish pride grafted onto Italian creates a son who believes his mother has a lover.

Even in the least interesting of these stories, one can find some reflection of the mores of the time.

In 1833, in France and even more in England, people kill in order to get hold of money. Two poor devils were executed the other day here, one twenty-three and the other twenty-seven: one named Vivaldi had killed his wife, because he had fallen in love with another woman, and the second one had shot and killed an *ultra* doctor,⁸ a man who had probably betrayed his country—and in both cases, there was no trace of a money motive.

Crimes based on money are boring, and one will find very little of that kind of thing here.

Preface

People often speak about Italian passion, that unbridled passion which sprang up in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but has died out today under the influence of French mores and the desire to imitate the fashionable life of Paris.

Preface

Around the year 1350, Petrarch made ancient manuscripts fashionable in Italy, and that resulted in people's conserving even contemporary manuscripts—and this in a century when knowing how to read and write would have been considered shameful for a fashionable Frenchman. And so it is that in 1839 there are so many treasures in the libraries of Italy. And to make our good fortune even greater, Italy having been divided up into a great many small states, each of which was headed by wise leaders, the Venetian ambassador to Florence couldn't care less about what was going on in Florence, while the Medici's ambassador to Venice couldn't care less about what the doge was up to.

But a strange thing happened once the two voting chambers were established (just as well and just as badly as they are established in France), following Napoleon's victories, which had inspired Italians with an enthusiasm at having been given a real country for several years;⁹ and above all, given that all Italy has been studying Monsieur Thiers's history of the Revolution,¹⁰ the legitimate sovereigns in Italy have concluded that they have a considerable advantage in staying out of the archives. Political thinking in 1500 was completely ridiculous; back then, they had not even invented representatives who would vote for greater taxes on the people who had elected them, and moreover they thought that all good political thinking could be found in the pages of Plato, though badly translated for so long. But the men of those times, and consequently the writers—who were by no means members of the Academy with their eyes on a Monthion prize¹¹—were filled with a fierce energy, and they knew what it was to live in

a small town under the watchful eye of a tyrant who had recently succeeded in suppressing the Republic.

So, one goes into the protected archives of Italy not to find passable arguments but instead for the occasional sublime poems in the style of Michelangelo, the kind of thing that can cast a unique light into the depths of the human heart. For even the most baroque and hideous government has one good thing about it, that it can tell us something about the human heart—something we would search for in vain in young America, where all passions are subordinated to the cult of the dollar.

Among the archives, the ones I was most anxious to get entrée to, where I presented myself as a civilized and inoffensive scholar who was interested only in Greek manuscripts—these were the archives of the bishops' tribunals, the authority of which has weakened only in our own time, following the shooting star that was Napoleon.

1855

VANINA VANINI

OR, PARTICULARS CONCERNING
THE MOST RECENT GATHERING
OF A CELL OF THE CARBONARI—
DISCOVERED IN THE PAPAL STATES



It was an evening in the spring of 182*. All Rome was talking about it: Monsieur the Duke of B***, that famous banker, was giving a ball in his new palazzo on the piazza di Venezia. All the most magnificent items that the arts of Italy and the luxuries of Paris and London could provide were brought together here to embellish this palazzo. The crowd was enormous. The blond, cool beauties of noble England had intrigued for the honor of attending this ball; they streamed in by the dozen. The loveliest women of Rome competed with them for the title of greatest beauty. One young woman, whose striking eyes and ebony hair proclaimed her to be Roman, entered, escorted by her father; all eyes were on her. Her every movement seemed to radiate an extraordinary hauteur.

Foreigners could be seen marveling at the magnificence of the ball. "None of the fetes given by the kings of Europe can compare with this," they said to each other.

But those kings do not possess a palazzo of Italian architecture, and they are always obliged to invite the great ladies of the court; Monsieur the Duke of B***, on the other hand, invited only pretty ones. And on this particular evening, he had been especially lucky with his invitations; the men in attendance seemed stunned. Among so many remarkable women, the question to decide was which one was the most beautiful; the decision remained uncertain for a time; but at last the princess Vanina Vanini—the same young girl with the fiery eyes and the ebony hair—was proclaimed queen of the ball. Soon, both foreigners and young Romans abandoned the rooms they had been in and crowded into the one where she was.

Her father, Prince Asdrubal Vanini, had wanted her to dance first with two or three German princes. After that, she accepted the invitations of some especially handsome, especially noble Englishmen; but their stiff, starched air bored her. She appeared to take more pleasure in tormenting young Livio Savelli, who appeared to be desperately in love with her. This was the most splendid youth in Rome, and he was moreover a prince; but if you had handed him a novel, he would have tossed the book aside after twenty pages, saying that it gave him a headache. This was a serious disadvantage in the eyes of Vanina.

Toward midnight, a rumor spread throughout the ball, creating a powerful effect. A young *carbonaro*, imprisoned at Castel Sant'Angelo, had just this night escaped with the aid of a disguise, and then, out of an excess of romantic audacity, encountering the very last set of prison guards, he attacked them with a dagger; but he had been wounded as well, and now the guards were pursuing him through the streets, tracking him by the bloodstains, and they were expected to have him soon.

As this anecdote was being related, Don Livio Savelli, dazzled by the graces and the successes of Vanina, with whom he had just danced, and mad with love for her, conducted her back to her place, saying to her:

“But for pity’s sake, tell me: just what kind of man would please you?”

“That young *carbonaro* who just escaped,” Vanina replied; “at least he has done something more than just give himself the trouble of being born.”

Prince Asdrubal came up to his daughter. He was a very rich man who, for twenty years, had failed to keep accounts with his steward; the latter lends the prince back his own money and charges him high interest for it. If you were to meet the prince in the street, you would take him for an old actor; you wouldn’t notice that his hands are adorned with five or six rings, each with a huge diamond. His two sons became Jesuits, and they both died mad. He has forgotten them; but he is annoyed that his only daughter, Vanina, doesn’t want to get married. She is already nineteen and has refused some of the most stunning offers. And her reason? The same one Sulla used for abdicating: *her contempt for Romans*.¹

The day after the ball, Vanina noticed that her father, the most negligent of men, one who never in his whole life bothered with keys, had very carefully locked the doorway to a little stairway leading to an apartment situated on the third floor of the palazzo. The apartment had windows looking out onto a terrace with orange trees. Vanina went off to pay some calls in Rome; when she returned, the main gate to the palazzo was blocked because of the preparations for an illumination,² so her carriage took her around to the courtyard in back. Vanina raised her eyes and was surprised to see that the windows her

father had closed with such care were now open. She slipped away from her waiting woman and ascended to the upper floors of the palazzo, where, by dint of searching, she found a little grilled window that looked out onto the terrace with the orange trees. The open window she had seen was now just a few paces away from her. Clearly, the room was inhabited; but by whom? The next day, Vanina succeeded in getting hold of the key to a little door that opened up onto the orange-tree terrace.

On tiptoes, she approached the still-open window, which was partly screened by a louvered shutter. At the back of the room was a bed, and there was someone on it. Her first instinct was to withdraw, but then she saw a woman's dress that had been thrown across a chair. Peering more closely at the person on the bed, she could see that she was blond, and evidently quite young. She had no doubt that it was a woman. The dress hanging from the chair was bloody; there was blood also on a pair of women's slippers on the table. The unknown made a movement; Vanina could see that she was wounded. Her chest was covered by a bloody bandage; the bandage was tied on only with ribbons; this was not the work of any surgeon. Vanina remembered that every day at four o'clock, her father locked himself in his apartment and then went in the direction of the unknown; he would soon come down and then get into his carriage and go to the countess Vittelleschi. As soon as he had gone, Vanina went up to the little terrace, from which she could observe the unknown. Her feelings were greatly moved for the unfortunate young woman; she strove to know what her story could be. The bloody dress hanging from the chair seemed to have been pierced by dagger thrusts. Vanina could count the tears in the dress. One day, she could see the unknown more distinctly: her eyes were blue and were fixed heavenward; she seemed to

be in prayer. Soon, her lovely eyes filled with tears; the young princess had all she could do to keep herself from speaking to her. The next day, Vanina dared to hide herself on the little terrace before her father came. She saw Don Asdrubal enter the unknown's room; he was carrying a little basket with provisions. The prince seemed disturbed, and he said little. He spoke so quietly that, even though the window was open, Vanina could not make out the words. He soon took his leave.

"This poor woman must have terrible enemies," Vanina said to herself, "for my father, who is usually so easygoing, not to dare confide in anyone, and to give himself the trouble of coming up twenty stair steps every day."

One evening, while Vanina was quietly peering in through the unknown's window, their eyes met, and the secret was out. Vanina went down on her knees, and cried out:

"I love you, and I will be your devoted friend."

The unknown gestured for her to enter the room.

"I owe you my apologies," Vanina exclaimed, "and how offensive my foolish curiosity must be to you! I swear to keep your secret, and if you demand it of me, I will go away and never come back."

The unknown replied, "Who would not find it a joy to see you? Do you live here in the palazzo?"

"Of course," said Vanina. "But I can see you don't know me: I am Vanina, the daughter of Don Asdrubal."

The unknown looked at her with an astonished air, blushed deeply, and then said: "Please, allow me to hope that you will come and visit me every day; but I ask you not to let the prince know of your visits." Vanina's heart was beating wildly; the unknown's manner seemed highly distinguished. The poor young woman must have

offended some powerful man; perhaps, in a fit of jealousy, she had killed her lover? Vanina could not imagine any vulgar cause for her present situation. The unknown told her that she had suffered a wound in her shoulder, one that had penetrated down into her chest and was causing her great pain.

Cried Vanina, "But you have no surgeon!"

The unknown replied, "You know that here in Rome, the surgeons must give the police a complete report on all the wounds they treat. The prince has been so kind as to dress my wounds with this bandage himself."

The unknown avoided self-pity with a perfect grace; Vanina loved her madly. But one thing did surprise the young princess greatly, and that was that in the middle of what was clearly a perfectly serious conversation, the unknown seemed to have a great deal of trouble keeping herself from bursting into laughter.

Vanina said, "I would be happy to learn your name."

"They call me Clémentine."

"Well then, my dear Clémentine, I will come back to see you tomorrow at five." But the next day, Vanina found her new friend in great pain.

Embracing her, Vanina said, "I want to bring a surgeon to see you."

"I would rather die," said the unknown. "Do you want me to compromise my benefactors?"

"The surgeon of Signor Savelli-Catanzara, the governor of Rome, is the son of one of our servants," Vanina replied quickly; "he is devoted to us, and because of his position, he fears no one. My father fails to do justice to his loyalty; I am going to ask for him."

"I want no surgeon!" the unknown cried out, with an intensity

that startled Vanina. "Come and visit me, and if God wants to call me to him, I will die happy in your arms."

The next day, the unknown was even worse. When Vanina was leaving, she said, "If you love me, you'll let me bring a surgeon."

"If he comes, my happiness will go."

"I am going to send to try to find him," Vanina replied. But without saying anything, the unknown held her back and covered her hand with kisses. There was a long silence; the eyes of the unknown were filled with tears.

Finally, she let go of Vanina's hand, and with a voice that sounded as if she were about to die, she said: "I have something to confess to you. The other day, I lied when I said my name was Clémentine; I am an unlucky *carbonaro*. . . ." Vanina, shocked, fell back into her chair and then quickly stood up.

"I know," the *carbonaro* continued, "that this confession is going to make me lose the only thing that makes me want to go on living, but it is unworthy of me to continue deceiving you. My name is Pietro Missirilli; I am nineteen years old; my father is a poor surgeon in Sant'Angelo in Vado, and I am a *carbonaro*. My *venti* was betrayed;³ I was transported, in chains, from the Romagna to Rome. Thrown into a cell lit day and night by a single lamp, I stayed there for thirteen months. A charitable soul came up with the idea for how I might escape. They dressed me up as a woman. As I was leaving the prison and passing by the guards at the final gate, I heard one of them cursing the *carbonari*; I struck him. I assure you that this was no act of bravado but a simple reflex. That imprudence led to my being hunted all night long through the streets of Rome and wounded by bayonet thrusts; losing my strength, I turned into a house where the door happened to be open; I heard the soldiers running in behind me; I leaped

into the garden; I landed at the feet of a woman who happened to be walking there. . . .”

“The countess Vittelleschi! My father’s friend!” said Vanina.

“What? She has told you about it?” cried Missirilli. “In any case, that lady, whose name must be kept secret, saved my life. Just as the soldiers were coming in to capture me, your father got me into his coach. I am in great pain; for several days now, one bayonet thrust into my shoulder has made it hard for me to breathe. I am going to die, and in despair because I will not see you anymore.”

Vanina had listened impatiently; now she rushed out quickly. Missirilli could discover no pity in those so-beautiful eyes, only the haughty demeanor of someone who has suffered an affront.

That evening, the surgeon appeared; he was alone. Missirilli was in despair; he feared he would never see Vanina again. He put some questions to the surgeon, who bled him but made no reply. The next days brought only the same silence. Pietro never took his eyes off the terrace from which Vanina used to enter his room; he was quite miserable. One time, near midnight, he thought he saw someone in the shadows on the terrace: was it Vanina?

Vanina came every night, pressing her cheek against the window of the young *carbonaro*. “If I speak to him,” she said to herself, “I am lost! No, I must never see him again!” This resolution once taken, she imagined despite herself the friendship she had felt for the young man when she had, so stupidly, taken him for a woman. “After a sweet intimacy like that, the only thing is to forget him!” In her most rational moments, Vanina was frightened by the extreme changes taking place in her thinking. Ever since Missirilli had told her his real name, all the things she had been accustomed to thinking had somehow grown faded, as if covered up by a veil, and now seemed very far away.

Less than a week had passed when Vanina, pale and trembling, came back into the young *carbonaro*'s chamber, accompanying the surgeon. She had earlier come to tell him to get the prince to let a domestic take his place. She had stayed less than ten seconds; but a few days later, she came back with the surgeon, out of humanity. One evening, when Missirilli was much better and no longer needed to fear for his life, she dared to come back alone. Seeing her pitched Missirilli to the very heights of happiness, but he tried to hide his feelings of love; after all, he did not want to betray the dignity that a man ought to maintain. Vanina, who had entered the room with her face blushing bright red and fearing to hear him talk of love, was taken aback to find him instead receiving her in a spirit of noble and devoted friendship, though not of the tender kind. She left without his trying to detain her.

A few days later, when she came back, she encountered the same behavior and the same respectful assurances of eternal devotion and gratitude. Far from having to restrain the feelings of the young *carbonaro*, Vanina began to ask herself if she were the only one in love. This girl, up to now so very proud, now felt bitterly the full extent of her madness. She affected an air of gaiety and even of coldness, and she came less often to his room, but she could not make herself cease coming to see the young invalid.

Missirilli, burning with love but remembering his own obscure origins and what they demanded of him, promised himself not to stoop to speaking of love unless Vanina were to stay away from him for an entire week. The pride of the young princess matched his at every move.

"Well," she said to herself at last, "if I come to see him, I do it solely for myself, for my own pleasure, and I will never admit what it is that makes me come to him." She made lengthy visits to him, and

he spoke to her the same way he would have if there had been twenty other persons present. One evening, after having spent the whole day detesting him and promising herself to be even colder and more severe with him than usual, she told him that she loved him. Soon, there was nothing left that she could refuse him.

Great as her folly was, it must be admitted that Vanina was perfectly happy. Missirilli no longer thought about what he owed to masculine dignity; he loved the way one does love when one is in love for the first time, nineteen, and in Italy. He felt all the scruples of passion-love,⁴ to the point of admitting to this haughty young princess the method he had used to make her fall in love with him. He was stunned by the sheer excess of his happiness. Four months passed by quickly. One day, the surgeon declared his young patient fully healed. Missirilli wondered, "What shall I do? Should I stay here, hidden in the house of one of Rome's most beautiful creatures? And while I do so, the vile tyrants who threw me into prison for thirteen months, not allowing me so much as a glimpse of the light of day, will believe that I am defeated! Oh, Italy, you are truly unfortunate if your children abandon you so quickly and for so little cause!"

Vanina never doubted that Pietro's greatest happiness would always lie in remaining closely attached to her; he seemed too happy; but a word from General Bonaparte was echoing in the young man's heart, influencing all his conduct toward women. In 1796, when General Bonaparte left Brescia, the local officials who accompanied him to the city gates said that Brescians loved liberty more than any other Italians did. "Oh yes," he replied, "they love to chat about it with their mistresses."

In a constrained voice, Missirilli said to Vanina, "As soon as night falls, I must be gone."

"Well, be careful to get back inside the palazzo before dawn; I'll be waiting for you."

"No, at dawn I shall be very far from Rome."

Vanina replied coldly, "Fine. Where are you going?"

"To the Romagna, for revenge."

"Since I am wealthy," Vanina said, somewhat more calmly, "I trust you will accept arms and money from me."

Missirilli looked at her for a moment without blinking; then, throwing his arms around her: "O soul of my life, you will make me forget everything," he said, "even my duty. But your heart is a noble one, so you must understand me." Vanina wept a great deal, and it was agreed that he would not depart for two days.

The next day, she said to him, "Pietro, you have often said that a well-known man, a Roman prince, for example, who could raise a great deal of money, would be capable of doing great things for the cause of liberty, if Austria were ever engaged in some great war far away."

Pietro, surprised, said, "Yes, of course."

"Well, then! You have the spirit for it; all you lack is high position; I am offering you my hand, along with my annual income of 200,000 livres. I will take it upon myself to gain my father's consent."

Pietro threw himself down at her feet; Vanina was radiant with joy. "I love you passionately," he said to her; "but I am a poor servant of my country; yet the more Italy is oppressed, the more I must remain faithful to her. In order to get Don Asdrubal's consent, I will have a sorry part to play for many years. Vanina, I must refuse you." Missirilli hastened to bind himself to what he was saying. Courage was failing him. "My misfortune," he cried, "is to love you more than life itself, and for me, leaving Rome is the greatest of tortures. Oh, if only

Italy were delivered from the barbarians! Then, with what pleasure would I embark with you, to go live together in America!”

Vanina stood there frozen. This refusal of her hand had injured her pride; but soon, she was back in the arms of Missirilli. “You have never seemed so lovable to me,” she exclaimed; “yes, my little country surgeon, I am yours always. You are as great a man as the ancient Romans.” All thoughts of her future, all the sad little warnings suggested by good sense evaporated: it was a moment of perfect love. When they were again able to speak rationally: “I will be in the Romagna almost as soon as you,” Vanina said. “I will have myself ordered to go to the baths in Poretta Terme. I will stop at a castle we own in San Nicolo, close to Forli. . . .”

“And there I shall live with you,” cried Missirilli.

“From this day on, my lot is to dare everything,” said Vanina with a sigh. “I will ruin myself for you, but it does not matter. . . . But can you love a dishonored woman?”

“Are you not my wife, and the woman I shall always adore? I will know how to love and protect you.”

Vanina had to go out for some social visits. As soon as she was gone, Missirilli began to view his own behavior as barbaric. He asked himself, “What is this ‘country’? It is not a being to whom we owe gratitude for some benefits bestowed, some person who can be suffering and who can curse us if we abandon it. ‘Country’ and ‘liberty’—I wear these like my cloak; they are a thing that is useful to me but a thing that I must purchase, since I did not inherit it from my father; but still, I love my country and I love liberty, because they are useful to me. If they were not useful, if they were like a heavy cloak in the month of August, what would be the point of purchasing them, and at such an enormous price?

“Vanina is so beautiful! Her character is so unique! Others will seek to please her; she will forget me. And where is the woman who has had only one lover? These Roman princes whom I so detest have so many advantages over me! They will be so easy for her to love! Oh, but if I leave her, I will lose her forever.”

In the middle of the night, Vanina came to see him; he told her about the uncertainties into which he had been plunged and the critical thoughts he had had, because he loved her, about that great word *country*. Vanina was extremely happy. She said to herself, “If he had to choose absolutely between country and me, he would choose me.”

The bells of the nearby church sounded out three o'clock; the moment for their final adieu had come. Pietro tore himself away from the arms of his love. He was already descending the little stairwell when Vanina, holding back her tears, said to him with a smile: “If you had been nursed back to health by some poor woman out in the countryside, would you not give her something for her trouble? Would you not find some way to pay her? The future is uncertain, and you are going out among your enemies: pay me back by giving me the next three days, as if I were the poor country woman who had taken care of you.” Missirilli stayed. Finally, he did leave Rome. Thanks to a passport he purchased from a foreign embassy, he reached his family safely. This was a great joy to them; they had thought he was dead. His friends wanted to celebrate his arrival by killing a *carabinier* or two (that is the term they use for police in the Papal States).

But Missirilli said, “Let us not unnecessarily kill any Italian who knows how to bear arms; our country is not an island like England: what we lack are soldiers to resist the interventions of the European monarchs.” Some time after this, Missirilli was being closely pursued

by *carabinieri* and ended up killing two of them, using the pistols Vanina had given him. There was now a price on his head.

Vanina did not arrive in Romagna; Missirilli thought he had been forgotten. His vanity was wounded; he began to contemplate the difference in rank between himself and his mistress. In a particularly emotional moment, feeling sorrow over the happiness he had lost, he had the idea of returning to Rome to see what Vanina was doing. This mad thought was about to drive him away from what he thought was his duty when, that evening, the mountain church bells rang the Angelus in a peculiar manner, as though the bell ringer had let himself be distracted. This was the signal for Missirilli's Romagna *venti* of *carbonari* to meet. That same night, they all came together in a certain hermitage in the forest. The two anchorites, stupefied by opium, had no idea of the usage to which their little dwelling was put. Missirilli arrived at the place in a sorrowful mood, and he there learned that the chief of the *venti* had been arrested and that he himself, scarcely twenty years old, had been elected chief of a *venti* that counted among its members men of more than fifty years of age, men who had been involved in the Murat expedition in 1815.⁵ Upon being given this unexpected honor, Pietro felt his heart beating stronger. When he was again alone, he resolved to think no more about the Roman woman who had forgotten him, and to concentrate all his thoughts on the goal of "delivering Italy from the barbarians."⁶

Two days later, Missirilli read in the reports given to him as chief concerning arrivals and departures in the region that Princess Vanini had just arrived at her castle in San Nicolo. Reading that name gave his heart more trouble than pleasure. It was in vain that he tried to assure himself of his fidelity to his country by not flying off that very evening to the San Nicolo castle; the thought of Vanina, which he

had evaded of late, now kept him from fulfilling his duties in a rational manner. He saw her the next day; she loved him still, just as she had in Rome. Her father, who had wanted to get her married, had delayed her departure. She had 2,000 sequins with her.⁷ This unlooked-for bounty did wonders for Missirilli's prestige in his new position. His men arranged for daggers to be made in Corfu; they gained control of the legate's private secretary, charged with hunting down *carbonari*. And they got hold of the list of priests who were acting as government spies.

This was the era that saw the completion of one of the least foolish conspiracies that were afoot in that unhappy Italy. I will not go into irrelevant details here. I will content myself with saying that if the enterprise had been a success, Missirilli would have received a great share of the glory. It was up to him to give the signal at which several thousand insurgents would have arisen, awaiting the arrival of their leaders. The moment of decision was approaching when, as happens so often, the conspiracy came to nothing due to the arrest of its leaders.

As soon as she arrived in the Romagna, Vanina thought she could see that the love of country was going to overwhelm all her lover's other affections. The young Roman's pride was nettled. She tried in vain to reason with herself; a black mood overwhelmed her: she found herself cursing this liberty. One day, when she had come to Forlì to see Missirilli, she could not control her misery, which till then her pride had allowed her to master. "Really," she said to him, "you love me like a husband; this is not what I deserve." Soon, tears were flowing; but they were tears of shame at having debased herself to the level of uttering reproaches. Missirilli responded to her tears like a man preoccupied. Suddenly, the idea of leaving him and returning

to Rome occurred to Vanina. She found a cruel joy in punishing herself for the weakness that had led her to speak. After a silence of a few seconds, her decision was made; she would feel unworthy of Misirilli if she did not leave him. She took pleasure in imagining his unhappy surprise when he would be searching for her in vain. Soon, she was deeply saddened by the thought of being unable to gain the love of a man for whom she had committed so many follies. Then, she broke the silence and tried everything she could to wring a word of love from him. He distractedly said some very tender things to her; but it was with a much less profound tone than he took when speaking of his political enterprises, as he exclaimed:

“Ah! If this plan doesn’t succeed, if the government finds us out again, I will quit the party.”

Vanina stood there immobile. For an hour, she felt as if she were seeing her lover for the last time. What he said just now cast a fatal gloom over her spirit. She said to herself: “These *carbonari* have received several thousand sequins from me. My own devotion to the conspiracy cannot be doubted.”

She finally came out of her reverie, saying to Pietro: “Would you like to spend a day with me at the San Nicolo castle? The meeting this evening doesn’t require your presence. Tomorrow morning at San Nicolo, we can take a walk; that will calm you and give you the composure you need for these important events.” Pietro consented.

Vanina left him to make preparations for the journey, locking the chamber door, as was her custom when she was hiding him.

She sought out one of her waiting women, who had left her service to get married and set up a shop in Forli. Once she had arrived at this woman’s house, she set herself to writing hastily, in the margins of a Book of Hours that she found in the room, the exact location of the

carbonari's meeting for that night. She concluded her denunciation with these words: "This *venti* is composed of nineteen members; here are their names and addresses." After having written out the list, completely accurate except for the omission of Missirilli's name, she said to the woman, in whom she had perfect confidence: "Take this book to the cardinal legate; have him read what I have written, and have him return the book to you. Here are ten sequins; if the legate ever mentions your name, your death is assured; but you will be saving my life if you have the legate read the page I have just written."

Everything went marvelously. The legate's fear kept him from behaving haughtily. He allowed the common woman to enter, though she had asked to remain masked; but he agreed on condition that her hands were to be tied. In this state, the merchant woman was introduced to the great man, whom she found seated behind a huge table covered with a green cloth.

The legate read the page from the Book of Hours, holding it as far away from him as he could, fearing some subtle poison. He returned it to the woman and did not have her followed. Less than forty minutes after having left her lover, Vanina saw her onetime waiting woman return, and now she returned to Missirilli, believing that henceforth he would belong to her alone. She told him that there was unusual activity in the town; people had seen patrols of *carabinieri* in streets where they normally did not go. "If you'll listen to me," she added, "we should leave this minute for San Nicolo." Missirilli agreed. On foot, they went to the princess's coach, which awaited them, along with one of her lady's companions, half a league from the town.

When they had arrived at the San Nicolo castle, Vanina, troubled by her actions, redoubled her tenderness toward her beloved. But in

speaking of love matters to him, she felt like she was playing a role. The day before, she had betrayed him, and she had felt no remorse. Holding her beloved tightly in her arms, she thought to herself: "Now there is a certain thing that someone could tell him, either to-day or anytime in the future, and that thing would make him recoil from me with horror." In the middle of the night, one of Vanina's domestics burst into her chamber. The man was a *carbonaro* without her ever having known it. Missirilli therefore had his secrets from her, even in details like this. She trembled. The man had come to tell Missirilli that in Forli during the night, the houses of nineteen *carbonari* had been surrounded and the men themselves arrested as they returned from the *venti*. In the scuffle, nine had escaped. The *carabinieri* had brought the ten to the prison of the citadel. As they entered, one of them had thrown himself into a well so deep that he was killed. Vanina lost her composure; fortunately, Pietro did not observe: he could have read her crime in her eyes. . . . The domestic added, "Right now the Forli garrison is lined up in every street. Each soldier is close enough to the next to be able to speak to him. The inhabitants cannot even cross the streets except at places where an officer is stationed."

After the man had left, Pietro sat thinking for a moment. Finally, he said, "There is nothing to be done for the moment." Vanina was dying inside; she trembled under her lover's gaze.

"What is wrong with you?" he asked her; but then his thoughts turned to other matters, and he ceased to look at her.

Around noon, she hazarded saying to him, "So there is another *venti* discovered; this should make things quiet for you for a while."

"Oh, *very quiet!*" Missirilli replied, with a smile that made her shudder.

She went to make a necessary visit to the curé of San Nicolo, who might have been a spy for the Jesuits. When she returned for dinner, at seven o'clock, the little room where her lover stayed concealed was empty. Beside herself, she ran throughout the house looking for him; he was nowhere to be found. Desperate, she returned to the little room; and only now did she see a note; it read:

I am going to surrender myself to the legate; I despair of our cause; heaven is against us. Who has betrayed us? Apparently the wretch has thrown himself into a well. Since my life is of no use for my poor Italy, I do not want my comrades seeing me as the only one not arrested and imagining that I was the one who gave them up. Farewell; if you love me, think of how to avenge me. Kill, destroy the vile creature who has betrayed us, even if it should be my own father.

Vanina fell back into a chair, half fainting, and plunged into the most miserable anguish. She could not speak a word; her eyes were dry and burning.

At last she flung herself down on her knees: "Great God!" she cried. "Hear my vow: yes, I will punish the creature who did the betrayal; but before I do that, I must somehow set Pietro free."

An hour later, she was on her way to Rome. For some time now, her father had been pressing for her return. In her absence, he had arranged for her marriage to Prince Livio Savelli. As soon as Vanina arrived, he spoke to her about it with trepidation. To his great astonishment, she consented at once. That very evening, at the home of Countess Vittelleschi, her father officially presented her to Don Livio; she spoke a great deal with him. He was the most elegant young man, with the most beautiful hair; but though he was thought to be quite intelligent, his character was seen as rather superficial, and

thus the government had no suspicions about him. Vanina thought that if she began by turning his head, she could make him into a useful agent. As he was the nephew of Monsignor Savelli-Catanzara, the governor of Rome and minister of police, she assumed no spies dared to keep an eye on him.

After treating the amiable Don Livio very nicely for several days, Vanina told him that she could never marry him: he was simply too frivolous. "If you weren't essentially a child," she said to him, "the doings of your uncle would not be secret from you. For example, what are they doing about the *carbonari* who were discovered recently in Forli?"

Two days later, Don Livio came to tell her that all the *carbonari* arrested in Forli had escaped. The gaze of her great black eyes rested upon him, accompanied by the bitterest, most contemptuous smile, and she did not deign to speak to him the rest of the evening. The day after next, Don Livio came to her to confess, blushing as he did so, that he had been tricked before. "But," he said now, "I've got hold of a key to my uncle's office; I looked at the papers there and found that a congregation (or commission) of the most trusted cardinals and prelates is assembling secretly to determine whether it would be best to try these *carbonari* in Ravenna or in Rome. The nine arrested in Forli, along with their leader, named Missirilli, who was stupid enough to give himself up, are currently being held in the castle of San Leo."⁸ At the word *stupid*, Vanina grasped hold of the prince with all her might.

"I want to see those official papers myself," she said to him, "and to go into your uncle's office; you surely misread them."

Don Livio shuddered at this; Vanina was asking something practically impossible; but the spirit this young woman showed redoubled

his love for her. A few days later, Vanina, disguised as a man and wearing a pretty little suit of livery from the Casa Savelli, was able to spend half an hour looking through the most secret papers of the minister of police. She felt a burst of joy when she came upon the daily report concerning the actions of "detainee Pietro Missirilli." Her hands trembled as she held the paper. Rereading the name, she almost felt ill. When she left the palazzo of the governor of Rome, Vanina permitted Don Livio to embrace her. "You are acquitting yourself well," she said to him, "with the tests I am setting you."

After that word of praise, the young prince would have set fire to the Vatican if he thought it would please Vanina. That evening, there was a ball given by the French ambassador; she danced a great deal, and almost always with him. Don Livio was drunk with happiness; he had to be kept occupied and not be allowed to reflect.

"My father is eccentric sometimes," Vanina said to him one day. "He fired two of his people, and they came crying to me. One has asked me to find him a position with your uncle, the governor of Rome; the other one, who had been an artillery soldier with the French, wants to get a place at Castel Sant'Angelo."

"I'll take them both into my service," said the young prince at once.

"Is that what I'm asking you?" Vanina retorted heatedly. "I'll repeat, word for word, what the two poor men are asking for; they deserve to get the places they seek, and not something else."

There was nothing more difficult. Monsignor Catanzara was the most serious of men and admitted only people well known to him into his service. In the midst of a life apparently filled with every pleasure, Vanina, racked with remorse, was utterly miserable. The slow pace of events was killing her. Her father's business manager

had been the one who supplied her with money. Should she flee her father's house and go to the Romagna and try to free her lover? However irrational this idea was, she was on the point of putting it into execution when chance took pity on her. Don Livio told her: "The ten *carbonari* from the Missirilli *venti* are being transferred to Rome, but they will be executed in the Romagna after their sentencing. This is what my uncle obtained from the pope this evening. You and I are the only ones in Rome who know the secret. Are you happy?"

"You have become a man," Vanina replied. "You may give me a portrait of yourself as a gift."

The evening before the day Missirilli was due to arrive in Rome, Vanina found a pretext to go to Città Castellana. It was in the prison there that they would house the *carbonari* being transferred from the Romagna to Rome. She saw Missirilli in the morning, as he was being taken out of the prison; he was chained, by himself, upon a cart; he looked pale, she thought, but not disheartened. An old woman tossed him a bouquet of violets; he smiled as he thanked her.

Vanina had seen her lover, and all her old ideas were rejuvenated; she found a new courage in herself. Well before this time, she had managed to secure a prestigious advancement for the abbé Cari, the chaplain of Castel Sant'Angelo, where her lover was about to be imprisoned; she had chosen this priest as her confessor. It is no small thing in Rome to be the confessor of the princess, niece of the governor.

The trial of the Forlì *carbonari* was not lengthy. The Ultra Party, to be avenged for the prisoners' having to be transferred to Rome despite their efforts, now saw to it that the judging commission was packed with the most ambitious prelates. The minister of police headed the commission.

The law against the *carbonari* was clear: these Forlì men could indulge no hope; but nonetheless they defended themselves by every means possible. Not only did the judges condemn them to death but several argued for the most extreme torture, cutting off their hands, etc. The minister of police, whose fortune was assured—for no one exits that position except to take the hat⁹—felt no need for any amputated hands: in passing on the sentence to the pope, he had all the men's punishments commuted to a few years in prison. The only exception was Pietro Missirilli. The minister saw in this young man a dangerous fanatic, and in any case he would have been condemned to death for the murder of the two *carabinieri* of whom we have spoken. Vanina saw his sentence as well as the commutations shortly after the minister had returned from the pope.

The next day, Monsignor Catanzara, coming home around midnight, could not find his valet; the minister, surprised, rang for him several times; finally, an old, dim-witted domestic appeared: the minister, impatient, took it upon himself to do his own undressing. He locked his door; it was very warm: he threw his jacket in a heap onto a chair. This jacket, tossed with somewhat too much force, traveled beyond the chair and struck the window's muslin curtain, landing there upon the shape of a man. The minister leaped over to his bed and grabbed a pistol. As he approached the window, a very young man, dressed in the livery of the house, came up to him from behind the curtain with a pistol in his hand. Seeing this, the minister raised his pistol, took aim, and was about to fire. The young man burst out into laughter: "Well, Monsignor, don't you recognize Vanina Vanini?"

"What is the meaning of this absurd joke?" replied the minister angrily.

"Let us reason things through calmly," said the young woman. "To begin with, your pistol is not loaded."

The minister, startled, saw that this was indeed the case; after which he quickly drew a dagger out of his pocket.¹⁰

Vanina said to him with a charming air, "Let us sit down, Mon-signor"; and she calmly seated herself upon a sofa.

"Are you alone, at least?" asked the minister.

"Quite alone, I assure you!" cried Vanina. The minister took care to verify this, walking about the chamber and looking in every corner; after which, he seated himself upon a chair about three paces from Vanina.

"What possible motive could I have," Vanina began, "in attempting to take the life of a man of moderation, a man who would probably be replaced by some weak-brained fanatic capable of destroying both himself and others?"

"Then what is it you want, mademoiselle?" said the minister with some heat. "This scene is not to my liking, and it must not go on much longer."

"What I am about to add," replied Vanina with some hauteur, abruptly dropping her gracious air, "has more to do with you than with me. I want the life of the *carbonaro* Missirilli saved; if he is executed, you will not survive him by a week. I personally have no interest in all this; the folly you complain of was carried out, first, for my own amusement, and second, to help out one of my friends. I have wanted," Vanina continued, switching now to her more genteel tone, "I have wanted to be of help to a gifted man, one who will soon be my uncle, and one who, one would think, ought to be concerned with enhancing the fortune of his house."

The minister's angry air evaporated; Vanina's beauty no doubt contributed to this rapid change. Everyone in Rome knew of Monsignor Catanzara's taste for pretty women, and in her disguise as a footman belonging to the Casa Savelli, with her tight silk stockings, her red waistcoat, her little sky-blue jacket with silver braiding, and her pistol in her hand, Vanina was simply ravishing.

"My future niece," the minister said, with what was almost a laugh, "you are in the middle of a very crazy enterprise, and I can tell it will not be the last one."

"I believe I can trust that a person of such wisdom," Vanina replied, "will keep my secret, especially with regard to Don Livio; and to bind you to it, my dear uncle, if you grant me the life of my friend's protégé, I will give you a kiss." All this was said in that tone of half-joking pleasantry that Roman women know how to employ when treating of the most serious things, and it was with that same tone that Vanina, despite the pistol in her hand, was able to color the scene as simply a visit the young Princess Savelli was making to her uncle, the governor of Rome.

Soon Monsignor Catanzara, haughtily dismissing any notion that he could be motivated by any feelings of fear, turned to explaining to his niece all the difficulties involved in saving the life of Missirilli. As he spoke, the minister paced around the chamber with Vanina; he picked up a carafe of lemonade that was sitting on the mantel, and filled a crystal drinking glass. Just when he was about to put it to his lips, Vanina stopped him, took it in her hand for a moment, and then threw it out into the garden with an air of apparent distraction. A moment later, the minister picked up a piece of chocolate from a candy dish. Vanina took this, too, from him, and said with a laugh:

"Be careful; everything in here is poisoned; your death was intended. I obtained mercy for my future uncle so that I should not enter the Savelli family completely empty-handed."

Monsignor Catanzara, stunned, thanked his niece and gave her to understand that she had good reason for being hopeful about Missirilli's life.

"Our bargain is complete," Vanina exclaimed, "and the proof of it is in the recompense," and she embraced him. The minister accepted his recompense.

"You must know, my dear Vanina, that I am not a man who enjoys bloodshed. Moreover, I am still young enough, though I must seem old to you, and I may well live to a time when blood spilled today will leave a stain." Two o'clock struck when Monsignor Catanzara accompanied Vanina to the little door leading to his garden.

The day after next, when the minister appeared before the pope, feeling very awkward about the task ahead of him, His Holiness pre-empted him by saying: "After all, it turns out that I have a favor to ask of you. There is one of these Forli *carbonari* who remains condemned to death; the thought kept me awake during the night: we must save the man." The minister, seeing the pope had taken his side, made many objections, and ended by writing up a decree of *motu proprio*, which the pope signed, though such a decree went against custom.¹¹

Vanina considered that although she might obtain a pardon for her lover, someone still might try to poison him. Since the day before, she had had her confessor the abbé Cari deliver Missirilli little packets of hardtack biscuits with the warning not to touch any food furnished by the state.

Vanina, having heard soon afterward that the Forli *carbonari* were

to be transferred to Castel San Leo, decided to try to see Missirilli as he passed through Città Castellana; she arrived there twenty-four hours before the prisoners; she found the abbé Cari there, who had preceded her by several days. He had convinced the jailer to allow Missirilli to attend a midnight mass in the prison chapel. But even more: if Missirilli would agree to having his arms and legs in chains, the jailer would retire to the chapel door so that he could continue to see the prisoner, for whom he was responsible, but he would not be able to hear anything that was said.

At last, the day that would decide Vanina's fate arrived. From the morning on, she shut herself up in the prison chapel. Who could describe the thoughts that tormented her all that long day? Did Missirilli love her enough to forgive her? She had betrayed his *venti*, but she had also saved his life. When her tormented brain allowed reason to dominate, Vanina hoped that he would consent to leave Italy with her: if she had sinned, it had been through an excess of love. When four o'clock sounded, she could hear the hoofbeats of the horses of the *carabinieri* on the pavement far away. Each footfall seemed to echo in her heart. Soon, she could hear the wheels of the carts bringing the prisoners. They stopped in the little square outside the prison; she saw two *carabinieri* lift out Missirilli, who had been alone in a cart, so weighted down with chains that he could not move. She thought, with tears in her eyes, "At least he is alive; he has not yet been poisoned!" The evening was cruel; the altar lamp, placed very high up and given very little oil by the jailer, was all that illuminated the somber chapel. Vanina's gaze wandered among the tombs of many great lords from the Middle Ages who had died in the prison. Their statues had a fierce look about them.

All sounds had long since ceased; Vanina was absorbed in her

dark thoughts. A little after midnight had sounded, she thought she could hear a faint sound like the rustling of a bat in flight. She tried to get up and walk, but she fell half fainting on the altar rail. At that same moment, two phantoms appeared beside her, though she had not heard them coming. It was the jailer and Missirilli, weighted down with so many chains that he seemed wrapped in them. The jailer opened up a lantern, which he set on the altar step next to Vanina in such a way that he could clearly see his prisoner. Then, he retreated into the darkness back by the doorway. As soon as the jailer had gone, Vanina threw her arms around Missirilli. Holding him tightly in her arms, she could feel nothing but the cold, sharp edges of his chains. She wondered, "Who has put these chains on him?" There was no pleasure in embracing her beloved. And this sorrow was followed by another even stronger: she suddenly was sure that Missirilli knew of her crime, because his greeting was so cold.

"Dear friend," he said to her at last, "I am sorry for the love you feel for me; it is in vain that I try to discover the merit in me that might have inspired it. Let us turn, please, to more Christian sentiments; let us forget the illusions that once blinded us; I can no longer be yours. The ill fortune that has dogged all of my endeavors is perhaps the result of the state of mortal sin in which I constantly find myself. Even if I listen only to the human counsel of prudence, why was I not arrested myself along with my friends that fatal night in Forlì? Why, when the moment of danger had come, was I absent from my post? Why did my absence furnish the grounds for the cruelest suspicions? I had another passion, stronger than my passion for the liberty of Italy."

Vanina could not ignore the surprise she felt at the change in Missirilli. Without being obviously emaciated, he nonetheless looked

now like a man of thirty. Vanina attributed this to the bad treatment he would have received in prison; she burst into tears. "Oh!" she exclaimed; "the jailers promised me they were treating you well!"

The fact was that with the approach of death, all the religious principles in the young *carbonaro*'s heart that could accord with his passion for the liberation of Italy had reappeared and blossomed. Little by little, Vanina could see that the changes she saw in her lover were moral ones, and not at all the result of physical mistreatment. Her sorrow, which she had thought was at its height, now grew even greater.

Missirilli ceased speaking; Vanina seemed at the point of suffocating with her sobs. He added, with some emotion in his voice as well: "If I were to love anything on this earth, it would be you, Vanina; but thanks be to God, I have only one goal now: I will die either in prison or in fighting for the liberty of Italy." There was a silence; evidently, Vanina was unable to speak: she tried, but in vain.

Missirilli continued: "Duty is cruel, my friend; but if there were no pain in accomplishing it, what would become of heroism? Give me your word that you will not seek to see me again."

As much as the chains around him would permit, he made a small movement toward her, extending his fingers toward her. "If you will allow a man who was once dear to you to give you some advice, be wise and marry the worthy man your father has chosen for you. Do not tell him anything that might lead to trouble; but likewise, do not try to see me again; let us be strangers to each other from this day forward. You have advanced a considerable sum for the service of your country; if she is ever delivered from her tyrants, that sum will be faithfully repaid in national bonds."

Vanina was devastated. In speaking to her, the only time his eyes showed any life was when he spoke of his *country*.

Eventually, though, pride came to the rescue of the young princess; she had about her some diamonds and some small files. Without replying to Missirilli, she offered him these. "I accept out of my duty," he said to her, "because it is right for me to try to escape; but I will never see you again, and I swear it on these new gifts. Farewell, Vanina; promise me never to write to me, never to try seeing me; let me devote myself entirely to my country; I am dead to you: farewell."

"No!" replied Vanina furiously; "I want you to know what I have done, guided by the love I had for you." She went on to tell him all her acts since Missirilli had left the San Nicolo castle to give himself up to the legate. When that story was done: "But all that is nothing," said Vanina; "I have done yet more, out of love for you." Then she told him of her betrayal.

"Ah! Monster!" he cried, furious, and threw himself upon her; he tried to attack and beat her with his chains. He would have succeeded, but the jailer came running at the very first cries. He seized Missirilli. "Go, monster; I never want to see you again," Missirilli said to Vanina, throwing at her, as forcefully as his chains would permit, her files and her diamonds; and he quickly moved away. Vanina lay there, crushed. She returned to Rome; and the papers have announced that she has just married Prince Don Livio Savelli.

VITTORIA ACCORAMBONI

DUCHESS OF BRACCIANO



Unhappily for me, and for the reader, this is by no means a piece of fiction but rather the faithful translation of a very serious narrative written in Padua in December 1585.

I found myself in Mantua some years back, hunting for the kind of sketches or little paintings that my small fortune would allow me to afford, but I was looking for painters who worked before the year 1600; it was around that date that originality in Italian art, which had already come under great peril at the conquest of Florence in 1530, finally died off altogether.¹

But instead of paintings, an old, very wealthy, and very greedy patrician offered to sell me, at a high price, certain manuscripts yellowed by time; I asked to have a look at them; he assented, adding that he had enough faith in my honesty that I would not memorize any spicy anecdotes that I might run across if I ended up not buying the manuscripts.

On that condition, which suited me, I looked through some three or four hundred volumes—to the great detriment of my eyes—in which the stories of tragic adventures of two or three centuries past were jumbled together with letters of challenge for duels, peace

treaties between bordering nobles, memoranda on all sorts of subjects, etc., etc. The old owner asked an enormous price for the manuscripts. After quite a lot of negotiation, I paid a considerable price for the right to make copies of certain short narratives that interested me and that demonstrated the customs in the Italy of around the year 1500. I have twenty-two folio volumes of them, and it is from one of these faithfully copied stories that the reader is about to read, provided he has the necessary patience. I know the history of Italy in the sixteenth century, and I believe that what follows is perfectly true. I have taken great pains to ensure that my translation of that old Italian style—solemn, direct, laden with allusions to the things and the ideas that preoccupied people during the pontificate of Sixtus V (in 1585)—would show no traces of the fine literature of our era, of our unprejudiced century.

The unknown author of the manuscript is quite circumspect, never making any judgment on a fact, never writing so as to lead the reader up to one: his only concern is to narrate truthfully. If from time to time he is picturesque without meaning to be, this is because in 1585, vanity had not yet surrounded every action every man performs with a halo of affectation; people believed that the only way to convince one's neighbor was to speak to him as clearly as possible. In 1585, with the exception of court jesters or poets, nobody strove to make himself liked by the way he spoke. Nobody would swear, for instance, "I will die at Your Majesty's feet," at the very moment when he had ordered post-horses for the purpose of fleeing the country: this particular brand of treachery had not yet been invented. People spoke little, and each gave careful attention to what others said to him.

And therefore, generous reader!—do not expect to find here a spicy style, fast-paced and glittering with fashionable allusions to the

latest ways of feeling; above all, do not expect the kind of seductive emotions you find in a George Sand novel. That great writer would have crafted a masterpiece out of the life and the miseries of Vittoria Accoramboni. The sincere and simple tale I present to you here has no advantages beyond those more modest ones of being historical. When by chance you find yourself traveling alone in a coach as night falls and your thoughts turn to the great art of plumbing the depths of the human heart, you may base your reflections on the circumstances of the story presented here. The author tells everything, explains everything, leaves nothing to the reader's imagination: he wrote this twelve days after the death of the heroine.²

Vittoria Accoramboni was born into a very noble family in a little town in the duchy of Urbino called Agubio. From her childhood, everyone noticed her rare and exceptional beauty, but this beauty was the least of her charms: she had everything that a highborn daughter would need to be widely admired. But among all her extraordinary qualities, there was nothing quite so remarkable about her, nothing that gave her quite so much the air of the prodigy, as an utterly charming grace that won her the hearts and the goodwill of everyone at first sight. And that simplicity which gave power to her every word was never troubled by the slightest artifice: you immediately put your wholehearted trust in this woman endowed with such extraordinary beauty. You might have been able to resist her enchantment, using all your willpower, if you had only seen her, but if you had also heard her speaking, or above all if you had actually had some conversation with her, you would have found it entirely impossible to escape such an extraordinary charm.

Many a young Roman gentleman came to her father's palazzo, which can still be seen on the Piazza Rusticucci near Saint Peter's,

seeking her hand. There was a great deal of jealousy, and there were many rivalries, but at last Vittoria's parents chose Félix Peretti, the nephew of Cardinal Montalto, now Pope Sixtus V, long may he reign.

Félix, son of Camille Peretti, the cardinal's sister, was originally called François Mignucci, but he took the name of Félix Peretti when he was formally adopted by his uncle.

When she came to enter into the Peretti family, Vittoria brought with her, though she did not know it, the kind of excellence that one might call fatal, a superiority that came with her everywhere she went; one might say that the only way not to adore her was never to have met her.³ Her husband loved her to the point of madness; her mother-in-law, Camille, and Cardinal Montalto himself seemed to have nothing else on earth to do but to seek out what might be the wishes of Vittoria and then seek to satisfy them. All Rome wondered at how the cardinal, whose fortune everyone knew was modest and who had always had an abhorrence of luxury, could find such unfailing pleasure in anticipating Vittoria's every wish. Young, stunningly beautiful, adored by everyone, she could not help but have some very costly desires. Her new relatives showered her with the costliest jewels, with pearls, in short, with all the rarest delights to be found among the Roman goldsmiths, who were at the time very well furnished with such items.

Out of love for his lovable niece, Cardinal Montalto, so renowned for his severity, treated Vittoria's brothers as if they were his own nephews. Octave Accoramboni, just when he had completed his thirtieth year, was named bishop of Fossombrone by the Duke of Urbino and Pope Gregory XIII—all because of the intervention of Cardinal Montalto. Marcel Accoramboni, a hot-headed and daring

young man accused of many crimes and sought after by the *corte*,⁴ had with great difficulty managed to escape a number of prosecutions that could have brought him to his death. But, honored by the cardinal's protection, he was able to breathe more freely.

Vittoria's third brother, Jules Accoramboni, was admitted to the first honors at the court of Cardinal Alexandre Sforza, as soon as Cardinal Montalto had requested it of him.

In a word, if men knew how to measure their good fortune not against the infinite insatiability of their desires but against the actual enjoyment of what they already have, the marriage of Vittoria with the nephew of Cardinal Montalto would have seemed like the height of human felicity to the Accoramboni. But the insane desire for immense and uncertain advantages can hurl even men at the peak of fortune's favor into strange and perilous thinking.

It is quite true that if any of Vittoria's relatives, out of a desire to acquire a greater fortune, had assisted—as a great many people in Rome suspected—in delivering her from her husband, he would quite quickly thereafter come to recognize how much wiser it would have been to be content with a more moderate but entirely agreeable fortune, one that should have reached the peak of what human ambition can desire.

While Vittoria was thus living like a queen in her own house, one night, when Félix Peretti had just got into bed with his wife, a letter from someone named Catherine was brought up to him; born in Bologna, she was Vittoria's chambermaid. The letter had been carried by one of Catherine's brothers, Dominique d'Acquaviva, nicknamed *Il Mancino* (the Left-Handed One). This man had been banished from Rome for a number of crimes, but, upon Catherine's plea, Félix had got him under the powerful protection of his uncle the

cardinal. Il Mancino came to Félix's house often, having inspired the latter to place great trust in him.

The letter of which we speak was written under the name of Marcel Accoramboni, the one of Vittoria's brothers who was dearest to her husband. He kept himself hidden outside of Rome most of the time, but still, from time to time he would take the chance of coming into the city, and when he did, he found refuge in the home of Félix.

In the letter delivered at this unexpected hour, Marcel called upon his brother-in-law Félix Peretti for help; he entreated him to come to his aid in a matter of the greatest urgency, adding that he would be waiting for him outside the Montecavallo palazzo.

Félix told his wife about this extraordinary letter, then got dressed, carrying no other arms than his sword. Accompanied by a single domestic carrying a lit torch, he was just about to depart when he turned to find his mother, Camille, and all the women in the house, including Vittoria herself; all begged him insistently not to leave the house at such a late hour. When he seemed not to respond to their prayers, they threw themselves on their knees, tears in their eyes, beseeching him to listen to them.

These women, and especially Camille, were struck with terror by tales of the strange things that people were reporting every day, things that went unpunished in the time of the pontificate of Gregory XIII, a time brimming with troubles and unheard-of plots of every kind. And they were also struck by a thought: when Marcel Accoramboni came to Rome, he was not in the habit of asking Félix to come to him, and such a request, at such an hour of the night, seemed to them to go beyond the bounds of decency.

Filled with all the fire of his youth, Félix would pay no heed to such fearful ideas; and when he learned that the letter had been de-

livered by Il Mancino, a man he greatly liked and to whom he had been of real service, nothing could hold him back, and he left the house.

He walked behind, as we noted, a single domestic carrying a lit torch; but the poor young man had barely walked up the first few steps of the Montecavallo palazzo when he was struck down by three harquebus bullets. The murderers, seeing him laid out on the ground, threw themselves upon him, stabbing him repeatedly with poniards until they were satisfied that he was dead. The fatal news was carried immediately to the mother and the wife of Félix, and soon to the ears of the cardinal his uncle.

The cardinal, without any change in his expression, without betraying the slightest emotion, got up at once and got himself dressed in his habit, and then commended to God both himself and that poor soul, so untimely taken away. He went straight to his niece's and, with an admirable gravity and an air of profound calm, began to rein in the cries and feminine weeping that resounded throughout the house. His authority over those women was so effective that from that moment on, and even when the corpse was carried out of the house, nothing was seen and nothing heard that in any way went beyond what takes place within the most decorous families with the most expected deaths. As for Cardinal Montalto himself, no one could surprise in him even the most moderate signs of even the simplest grief: nothing was changed in the organization and the appearance of his outward life. Rome was soon convinced of this, after having closely observed, with her customary curiosity, every movement of the man so powerfully affronted.

By chance, it happened that the very next day after the violent death of Félix, the consistory of cardinals was convoked at the Vati-

can. Everyone in the town assumed that, for this first day at least, Cardinal Montalto would exempt himself from this official function. There, he would have to appear before the gaze of so many, and of so many curious onlookers! People would take careful note of the slightest signs of that natural weakness that it is always best to hide when a person of eminence is seeking a position of even greater eminence; after all, everyone would agree that it is not fitting that someone who aspires to elevate himself above all other men should reveal that he is a man like all the others.

But the people who would have thought this way would have been doubly wrong, for, in the first place, the cardinal, as was his custom, was among the first to arrive in the consistory, and then, it was impossible for even the sharpest eyes to discover in him any sign whatsoever of any human feeling. On the contrary, by the replies he made to those colleagues who, after so cruel an incident, wanted to express their words of consolation to him, he stunned everyone. The constancy and the apparent solidity of his heart and soul in the wake of such an atrocious misfortune soon became the talk of the whole town.

It is also true that within this same consistory certain men more practiced in the courtly arts attributed this apparent insensibility not to a lack of feeling but rather to an excess of dissimulation; and this way of seeing it was soon widely shared among the multitude of courtiers, on the theory that it was useful not to show oneself to be too wounded by an offense whose author might be powerful and who could perhaps at a later date bar one's path to the supreme office.

Whatever was the cause of this apparent and complete lack of feeling, one certain fact was that it struck all of Rome and the court of Gregory XIII into a kind of stupor. But, to return to the consistory, when, the cardinals having all reunited, the pope himself came into

the room, he soon turned his gaze onto Cardinal Montalto, and His Holiness could be seen to have tears in his eyes; as for the cardinal, his expression never varied from its usual impassiveness.

The general astonishment was redoubled when, during the same consistory, Cardinal Montalto went in his turn to genuflect before the throne of His Holiness, to give him a report on the tasks with which he had been charged. The pope, after letting him begin, could not help but let his own weeping be heard. When His Holiness was again able to speak, he tried to console the cardinal by promising him that so vile a murder would result in swift and severe justice. But the cardinal, after having very humbly thanked His Holiness, begged him not to order any investigations into what had happened, protesting that, for his part, he forgave whoever had done this deed, whoever he was, with all his heart. And immediately after this request, expressed in very few words, the cardinal returned again to the details of the tasks with which he had been charged, as if nothing unusual had taken place.

The eyes of all the cardinals present at the consistory were fixed on the pope and on Montalto; and although it is a difficult thing to deceive the practiced eye of a courtier, no one would have said that Cardinal Montalto's expression had betrayed the slightest emotion upon seeing, directly in front of him, the tears of His Holiness—who was, to speak truly, quite beside himself. This startling impassiveness of Cardinal Montalto underwent no change during his entire audience with His Holiness. The pope himself was struck by it, and when the consistory had ended, he could not help but say to Cardinal San Sisto, his favorite nephew:

“Vèramente, costui è un gran frate!” (No doubt about it, this man is a proud monk!)⁵

The behavior of Cardinal Montalto was in no way different during the following days. Thus, because it was customary, he received condolence visits from cardinals, prelates, and Roman princes, and with each of them, no matter what kind of relationship he had with them, he let slip not a single word of sorrow or lamentation. With each one, after a short reflection on the instability of all human things, confirmed and fortified by phrases and texts drawn from the scriptures or the church fathers, he quickly changed the direction of the conversation and began to speak of news from the city or the particular affairs of the individual with whom he found himself, precisely as if it were he who was doing the consoling.

Rome was especially curious to hear what passed during the visit paid to him by Prince Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, to whom rumor attributed the death of Félix Peretti. The vulgar thought that Cardinal Montalto would not be able to remain in a personal conversation with the prince without showing some hint of his feelings.

At the moment when the prince came to the cardinal's, the crowd outside in the street and around the door was enormous; there were many courtiers present in every room in the house, so great was the curiosity to see the faces of the two interlocutors. But not a one of them was able to see anything out of the ordinary. Cardinal Montalto conformed in every way to the expected proprieties; he even showed a remarkable expression of hilarity on his face, and his manner of addressing the prince was entirely affable.

A moment after the audience, upon getting back into his coach and finding himself alone with his intimates, Prince Paolo could not help but laugh and exclaim: "*In fatto, è vero che costui è un gran frate!*"

(By heaven it is true, the man is a proud monk!). It was as if he wanted to confirm the report of the pope's remark some days earlier.

Wise observers thought that the conduct of Cardinal Montalto in this incident smoothed out his path to the throne; for many people formed the opinion that, whether it was by nature or by his virtue, he either could not or would not do anyone any harm, even when he had had the greatest provocation to be angered.

Félix Peretti had left no written testament regarding his wife, and as a result, she was returned to the home of her parents. Cardinal Montalto ensured that when she left, she had all the clothes, jewels, and various gifts that she had received while she had been his nephew's wife.

On the third day after the death of Félix Peretti, Vittoria, accompanied by her mother, went to live in the palazzo of Prince Orsini. Some said that the women were brought to this decision out of fear for their own personal safety, the *corte* having threatened to charge them with "consent" to the homicide, or at least to prior knowledge of it.⁶ Others thought (and what followed seemed to confirm this idea) that the move was made to bring about a marriage, the prince having promised to marry Vittoria as soon as she no longer had a husband.

In any case, neither then nor later was it known who murdered Félix, though everyone had their various suspicions. Most people, though, attributed his death to Prince Orsini; everyone knew he had been in love with Vittoria, for there had been unequivocal signs of it, and the marriage that followed served as the great proof, for the woman was of such an inferior social position that only the tyranny of passion could have raised her up to the level of an equal's rank for

the purpose of marriage.⁷ The vulgar were not shaken from this view by a letter addressed to the governor of Rome, which had been widely distributed a few days after the murder. This letter was signed with the name of César Palantieri, a fiery-spirited young man who had been banished from the city.

In the letter, Palantieri said that it was not necessary for the illustrious signori to give themselves the trouble of looking elsewhere for the man responsible for the murder of Félix Peretti, because he himself had had him killed following certain differences of opinion that had arisen between them some time before.

Many thought that this assassination could not have happened without the consent of the Accoramboni family. Vittoria's brothers were suspected of having been seduced into it by their ambitions to forge close ties with a prince so powerful and rich. Marcel especially was suspected, on the basis of the letter that had made the unlucky Félix leave his house. People even spoke ill of Vittoria herself, when she was seen consenting to go live in the Orsini palazzo, and so soon after the death of her husband. Gossip maintained that it was highly unlikely that two people would start using their short blades so soon if they had not already, for some time, been using weapons of a longer reach.⁸

The inquiry into the murder was led by Monsignor Portici, governor of Rome, as ordered by Gregory XIII. All that one finds there is that Dominique, nicknamed Il Mancino, having been arrested by the *corte*, confesses, without being put to the question (*tormentato*), in his second interrogation, dated February 24, 1582:

“That Vittoria's mother was the cause of everything, and that she was seconded by the *cameriera* from Bologna, who took refuge immediately after the murder in the citadel of Bracciano (belonging to

Prince Orsini, and a place the *corte* dared not enter), and that the underlings who executed the crime were Machione de Gubbio and Paolo Barca de Bracciano, *lancie spezzate* (soldiers) in the employ of a lord whose name, for reasons of his status, is not inserted here.”

To these “reasons of status” were added, I imagine, the entreaties of Cardinal Montalto, who asked repeatedly that the investigation stop here, and in fact there was now no more question of a trial. Il Mancino was released from prison with the *precetto* (order) to return immediately to his home region, under pain of death, and never to leave it without express permission. The man was released in 1583 on Saint Louis’s Day, and because that day was also the birthday of Cardinal Montalto, the circumstance confirmed me more and more in the belief that it was at his insistence that the affair was terminated in this way. Under a government as feeble as that of Gregory XIII, such a trial could have had the most disagreeable consequences, without any kind of compensatory advantages.

The actions of the *corte* were thus brought to a halt, but Pope Gregory XIII did not want to give his consent to the marriage of Prince Paolo Orsini, Duke of Bracciano, and the widow Accoramboni. His Holiness, after having sentenced the latter to a kind of imprisonment, gave a *precetto* to the prince and the widow stating that they were by no means to marry each other without express permission from himself or his successors.

Gregory XIII came to die at the beginning of 1585, and the specialists in law, consulted by Paolo Orsini, having concluded that in their view the *precetto* had been annulled by the death of him who had imposed it, the prince resolved to marry Vittoria before the election of a new pope. But the marriage could not be brought off as quickly as the prince wanted, in part because he wanted to have the consent

of Vittoria's brothers, and as it turned out, Octave Accoramboni, bishop of Fossombrone, would never give his; and in part because no one believed that the successor to Gregory XIII would be elected so quickly. The fact is that the wedding took place on the same day as the election of Cardinal Montalto, so involved in this affair, to the papacy, that is to say on April 24, 1585, which may have been mere chance or may have been because the prince wanted to show that he was no more afraid of the *corte* under this new pope than he had been under Gregory XIII.

This marriage was a profound affront to the soul of Sixtus V (for that was the name chosen by Cardinal Montalto); he had already cast aside his monklike ways of thinking, and his soul had mounted up, reaching the higher status to which God had just raised him.

The pope, however, showed no signs of anger; but when Prince Orsini was presented to him that same day, among the crowd of Roman lords, to kiss his foot, and with the secret intention of reading behind the features of the Holy Father just what he should expect or fear from this man hitherto so little known, he perceived that the time for pleasantries had passed. The new pope stared at the prince with a singular expression, not having responded to the compliment addressed to him by even a single word, and the prince made up his mind that he needed to determine immediately what the intentions of His Holiness were with regard to him.

Through the intervention of Cardinal Ferdinand de Medici (the brother of his first wife) and of the Catholic ambassador, he asked for and obtained from the pope an audience in his chamber. There, he addressed a carefully planned speech to His Holiness in which he, without mentioning anything that had happened in the past, rejoiced with him on the occasion of his new office and offered him, like a very faithful vassal and servant, all his possessions and all his power.

The pope⁹ listened with an extraordinary seriousness and in the end replied that no one desired more than he did that the life and acts of Paolo Giordano Orsini would be in the future worthy of the Orsini name and of a true Christian knight; and that as for what he had been in the past in his relations with the Holy See and with the person of the pope, no one but his own conscience could say; but that he, the prince, could be absolutely sure of one thing, that although he willingly forgave him for what he had done against Félix Peretti and against himself, Cardinal Félix Montalto, he would never forgive him for anything he might do against Pope Sixtus; and that, in consequence, he now tasked him with returning immediately to his house and expelling from it and from all his estates all the brigands (exiles) and evildoers to whom up to now he had been giving asylum.

Sixtus V had an exceptionally effective manner of speaking when he chose to use a certain tone; but when he was angered and threatening, people said his eyes seemed to shoot lightning. One thing certain is that Prince Paolo Orsini, having been accustomed all his life to striking fear into popes, was now led to think very seriously about his own situation by the way the pope had just spoken to him, a manner whose like he had not heard for thirteen years, so that as soon as he left the palazzo of His Holiness, he hurried to Cardinal de Medici to tell him what had just happened. Upon the cardinal's counsel, he resolved to dismiss with no delay all the men fleeing arrest to whom he had given asylum in his palazzo and on his estates, and he began to think as quickly as he could of some honorable pretext he could use for immediately departing the lands under the power of so resolute a pope.

Now, it is important to know that Prince Paolo Orsini had become extremely fat; his legs themselves were thicker than the whole body of an ordinary man, and one of these enormous legs was

afflicted with what is called *lupa* ("the wolf"), a term that comes from the fact that the limb must have a great deal of fresh meat applied to the diseased part. If this is not done, the violent disease, finding dead flesh insufficient for its nourishment, falls upon the surrounding living flesh and devours it.

The prince used this malady as a pretext for going to the celebrated baths at Albano, near Padua, a region under the rule of the Republic of Venice; he left with his new spouse around the middle of June. Albano was a safe haven for him, for the Orsini for a great many years had forged close ties with the Venetian republic through mutual services.

Once arrived in this secure region, the prince thought only of how to combine the pleasures of several different residences, and to this end he rented three magnificent palazzos: one in Venice, the Dandolo palazzo, in the Rue de la Zecca; the second at Padua, the palazzo Foscari, on the magnificent plaza they call the Arena; and the third at Salò, on the delicious banks of Lake Garda. This last in earlier times had belonged to the Sforza Pallavicini family.

The Venetian signori (the government of the republic) were pleased to learn of the arrival of such a prince, and they quickly offered him a very noble *condotta* (that is, a considerable sum, paid annually, to be employed by the prince in raising a force of two or three thousand men over whom he would assume command). The prince nimbly got himself out of this entanglement; he responded to the senators by saying that, although he felt both a natural and a hereditary inclination to serve the Serene Republic with all his heart, nonetheless, finding himself presently attached to the Catholic Majesty, it did not seem appropriate for him to accept any other engagement. Such a resolute response cooled the ardor of the senators. At first they had

planned to give him, upon his arrival in Venice, a very honorable reception in the name of the entire people; now, upon his reply, they determined to let him arrive in the city like any other private person.

Prince Orsini, informed of all this, resolved not to go to Venice at all. He was already in the neighborhood of Padua, so he made a detour into this admirable region and soon came to the house prepared for him in Salò, on the banks of Lake Garda. He spent the entire summer there amid the most agreeable and the most varied pastimes.

The time for changing residences having arrived, the prince made a few brief trips, after which he seemed more fatigued than usual; there were concerns for his health. At last he decided to spend a few days in Venice, but his wife, Vittoria, talked him into changing his mind and staying on at Salò.

Some people have believed that Vittoria Accoramboni knew of the peril that daily threatened her husband, and that the only reason she had them stay on at Salò was as part of a plan to move on soon out of Italy entirely, to go, for example, to some free city among the Swiss; this would ensure that, in case of her husband's death, she and her fortune would be safe.

Whether this conjecture was well founded or not, the fact is that nothing of the kind happened, for the prince fell ill from a new malady in Salò, on the tenth of November; he had a premonition at once of what was going to happen.

He felt pity for his unfortunate wife; he could see her, in the finest flower of her youth, left impoverished, bereft of both her reputation and her fortune, hated by the reigning princes of Italy, not much loved even by the Orsini, and without any hope of another marriage after his death. Like a magnanimous lord, true to his word, he made of his own accord a will that he hoped would assure the fortune of

the ill-fated woman. He left her, in money and in jewels, the great sum of 100,000 piastres,¹⁰ as well as all the horses, coaches, and furnishings used in their travels. All the rest of his fortune he left to Virginio Orsini, his only son, born of his first wife, the sister of François I, Grand Duke of Tuscany (the woman he had had killed for her infidelity, with the consent of her brothers).

But how ill-founded are all the plans of humankind! The very dispositions that Paolo Orsini thought would assure perfect security for his doomed young wife turned out to be precipices leading to her ruin.

After having signed his will, the prince felt a little better on the twelfth of November. On the morning of the thirteenth, he was bled, and the doctors, whose only hope lay in a strict diet, left the most precise orders forbidding him to eat anything else.

But they had scarcely left the chamber when the prince demanded to be served dinner; no one dared contradict him, and he ate and drank as he normally would. The meal was barely over when he lost consciousness, and two hours before sundown he was dead.

After this sudden death, Vittoria Accoramboni, accompanied by Marcel, her brother, and all the entourage of the deceased prince, returned to Padua, to the Foscari palazzo situated on the Arena, the same palazzo that Prince Orsini had rented.

Shortly after their arrival, she was joined by her brother Flaminio, who was in great favor with Cardinal Farnese. She busied herself with all the details needed to obtain the payment of the legacy left her by her husband; the legacy came to 60,000 piastres, payable to her over a two-year period, and that was besides the dowry, the counter-dowry, and all the jewels and furnishings that had been in her possession. Prince Orsini had decreed, in his will, that either in Rome or some other city to be chosen by the duchess, a palazzo would be purchased for her in the price range of 10,000 piastres; and a vineyard (if

it were in the country), of 6,000. He further ordained that her table and all her service should be fitting for a woman of her rank. The service was to consist of forty domestics, with an appropriate number of horses.

Signora Vittoria had a great deal of hope in the goodwill of the princes of Ferrara, Florence, and Urbino, and in that of the cardinals Farnese and de Medici, named as executors of the will by her husband. It should be noted that the will had been made in Padua and submitted to the wise judgment of the excellent Parrisolò and Menochio, both leading professors at that university and still today celebrated legal scholars.

Prince Louis Orsini arrived at Padua to attend to what needed to be done relative to the deceased duke and his widow, and to betake himself afterward to the island of Corfu, where he had been appointed by the Serene Republic.

There arose, first, a difficulty between Signora Vittoria and Prince Louis concerning the horses of the deceased duke, which the prince maintained were not technically furnishings, in the ordinary sense of that word; but the duchess argued that they should be considered as such, and it was agreed that she would keep the use of them until an ultimate decision was reached; she named as a surety Signor Soardi de Bergamo, condottiere to the Venetian signori, a wealthy man and one of the premier citizens of his country.

Then another difficulty arose, on the subject of a certain silver vessel that the deceased duke had given to Prince Louis as a pledge for a sum of money that he had loaned the duke. Everything was decided by the courts, for His Serenity (the Duke) of Ferrara saw to it that the last wishes of Prince Orsini were followed to the letter.

This second affair was settled on the twenty-third of December, which was a Sunday.

The following night, forty men burst into the house of the aforesaid Lady Accoramboni. They were dressed in strange clothes, worn in such a way that they could not be recognized, not even by their voices, for when they spoke, they called each other by false names.

They first sought out the duchess herself, and when they located her, one of them announced: "Now, it is time to die."

And without giving her even a moment, and even as she was calling out to God, he stabbed her beneath the left breast, and, twisting the knife in every direction, the cruel villain asked her several times if he had yet reached her heart; finally, she breathed her last. Meanwhile, the others were seeking out the brothers of the duchess, one of whom, Marcel, had his life saved by virtue of not having been in the house; the other was stabbed a hundred times. The murderers left the bodies lying on the ground while the entire household was crying out and weeping; and when they had got hold of the strongbox containing the jewels and the money, they left.

The news came rapidly to the magistrates of Padua; they saw to it that the bodies were identified, and sent a report to Venice.

All through the day Monday, a huge crowd gathered outside the palazzo and outside the Church of the Eremitani to view the corpses. The curious were moved by pity, particularly to see the duchess so beautiful: they wept for her misfortune, *et dentibus fremebant* (and ground their teeth) against the assassins; but no one knew what their names might be.

The *corte* having developed the suspicion, based on very strong clues, that the thing had been done on the orders of, or at least with the consent of, the above-named Prince Louis, he was called before them; and he, wishing to enter *in corte* (into the tribunal) of the most illustrious captain with a suite of forty armed men, found the door

barred to him, and they told him he could enter with only three or four. But as soon as the three or four entered, the others rushed in behind them, overwhelming the guards, and they entered as a body.

Prince Louis came before the most illustrious captain complaining of the affront done to him and insisting that no sovereign prince had ever been treated in such a way. When the most illustrious captain asked him if he knew anything about the death of Signora Vittoria and of what had happened on the preceding night, he replied that yes, he did, and that he had ordered a report to be made to the authorities. They wanted to take down his testimony in writing; he replied that men of his rank were not bound by any such formality and that, likewise, they were not to be interrogated.

Prince Louis asked permission to send a courier to Florence with a letter for Prince Virginio Orsini, to whom he was submitting his report about the proceedings and the crime that had taken place. He displayed a false letter, not the real one, and his request was granted.

But the courier was stopped outside the city and carefully searched; the letter that Prince Louis had sent was found, and a second one was found hidden in the courier's boot; its tenor was as follows:

To His Lordship Virginio Orsini

Most Illustrious Lord,

We have carried out what we planned together, and in such a way that we have duped the most illustrious Tondini (this was apparently the name of the chief of the *corte* that had interrogated the prince) so completely that they take me here for the finest gentleman in the world. I took care of the thing personally, so do not fail to send the people we agreed upon immediately.

This letter made an impression on the magistrates; they hurried to have it sent to Venice; by their order, the gates of the city were closed, and soldiers were set to guard the walls day and night. They proclaimed an order threatening the most severe punishment for anyone who knew anything about the assassins and failed to communicate what they knew to the authorities. Any of the murderers who gave testimony against the others were not to be prosecuted; in fact, they would receive a monetary reward. But toward the seventh hour of the night on Christmas Eve (that is, around midnight on the twenty-fourth of December), Aloïse Bragadin arrived from Venice, empowered by the senate to arrest, dead or alive, no matter what the cost, the aforesaid prince and his people.

The aforesaid Signor Bragadin and the captain and chief magistrate all met in the fortress.

A decree went out for all militiamen, whether foot soldiers or cavalry, under pain of facing the gallows (*della forca*), to muster fully armed and surround the house of the aforesaid Prince Louis, which was next to the fortress, and adjoining the Church of Saint Augustine on the Arena.

The day dawned—Christmas Day—and another edict was published exhorting the sons of Saint Mark¹¹ to arm themselves and hurry to the house of Prince Louis; those without arms were to come to the fortress, where they would be furnished with what they needed. This edict promised a reward of 2,000 ducats to anyone who would bring the aforesaid Prince Louis, dead or alive, to the *corte*, and one of 500 ducats for any of his men. Moreover, anyone who did not have arms was not to approach the house of the prince, so as not to be in the way of those in the fight, in case the prince decided to hazard an attack.

At the same time, cannons, mortars, and other large artillery were arrayed on the old walls and aimed at the house occupied by the prince; there were also a number of them set up on the new walls, from which the back of the house could be observed. On this side, the cavalry were stationed, where they could move most freely were they needed. Along the riverside, people were busy piling benches, armoires, carts, and other such things to form parapets. The plan was that this would be an obstacle to the besieged in case they tried to form a wedge and break through the assembled people. These parapets would also serve to protect the artillery men and the soldiers against the harquebus fire from the besieged.

Finally, boats were stationed on the river facing all sides of the prince's house, filled with men armed with muskets and other arms to harass the enemy if he tried to break out; and at the same time barricades were set up in every street.

During these preparations, a letter arrived, written in the most suitably dignified terms, in which the prince complained of having been found guilty and seeing himself be treated like an enemy, even a rebel, before there had even been a proper inquest. This letter had been written by Liveroto.

On December 27, the town's three leading gentlemen were sent by the magistrate to Prince Louis, who had with him in his house forty men, all seasoned men-at-arms. They were found busily fortifying parapets with boards and mattresses soaked in water, and readying their harquebuses.

These three gentlemen declared to the prince that the magistrates were determined to arrest him; they exhorted him to give himself up, adding that if he did so before any actual fighting began, he could expect to be treated mercifully. To this Prince Louis replied that if

first the guards posted around his house were withdrawn, he would come to the magistrates accompanied by two or three of his men to discuss the matter, on the condition that he would be free at any time to return to his house.

The ambassadors took these propositions, written in his own hand, and returned to the magistrates, who refused the conditions, especially after hearing the counsel of the most illustrious Pio Enea and other nobles present. The ambassadors returned to the prince, telling him that if he did not surrender himself purely and simply, his house would be demolished by the artillery; to which he replied that he would rather die than undergo such an act of submission.

The magistrates gave the battle signal, but, although it would have been easy to destroy the house with a single concentrated volley, they preferred to proceed more carefully in order to see if the besieged could be induced to surrender.

This plan was successful, and Saint Mark was saved a great deal of expense that would have been required to rebuild what the bombardment of the palazzo would have destroyed; but it was not generally approved of. If Prince Louis's men had acted quickly and rushed together out of the house, the outcome would have been quite uncertain. These were experienced veterans, lacking neither munitions nor arms nor courage, and above all they had a vested interest in not losing: Would it not be better to die by a bullet from a harquebus than at the hands of the executioner? And anyway, who were they dealing with? A lot of inexperienced besiegers who scarcely knew their own weapons; in that case, the magistrates might have had reason to repent of their clemency and goodwill.

Thus, they began by bombarding the colonnade that ran along the front of the house; then, aiming a little higher each time, they de-

stroyed the facade just behind it. Meanwhile, the men inside furiously fired their harquebuses, but with no effect beyond wounding one local man in the shoulder.

Prince Louis cried out impetuously, "To battle! To battle! War! War!" He was busily casting bullets from his pewter tableware and the lead from the windows. He threatened to mount an attack, but the besiegers now shifted their tactics and brought up heavier artillery.

At the first blow, it brought down a large section of the house, and a certain Pandolfo Leupratti de Camerino fell into the ruins. This was a man of great courage and a bandit of considerable importance. He had been banished from the Papal States, and his head had a reward of 400 piastres put upon it by the most illustrious Signor Vitelli, in revenge for the killing of Vincent Vitelli, who had been attacked within his coach and killed with both harquebus bullets and poniard thrusts, a death ordered by Prince Louis Orsini and carried out by the aforesaid Pandolfo and his companions. Stunned by his fall, Pandolfo could not move at all; a servant of the lords of Caidi Lista advanced upon him, armed with a pistol, and very courageously cut off his head, which he then hurried to carry back to the magistrates at the fortress.

Soon after this, another shot from the artillery brought down another section of the house and along with it the Count de Montemellino de Pérouse, who died there in the ruins, his body shattered by the cannonball.

Then they saw a person named Colonel Lorenzo, from the nobles of Camerino, come out of the house and give proofs of that valor which had been so highly valued by the prince. He resolved not to die without vengeance, and he tried to take up his gun, but as it happened, and by the grace of God, the harquebus jammed, and in that

very instant he was cut in half by a cannonball. The shot had been fired by a poor devil, a tutor at the boys' school at Saint-Michel. And when the man approached to take the dead man's head as proof he could offer in claiming his reward, he was overtaken by some others more nimble and stronger than him; they made off with the colonel's purse, his belt, his gun, his money, and his rings, and they even got his head.

These two having been killed, the ones in whom Prince Louis had placed so much of his confidence, he was greatly troubled, and now he made no other movements.

Signor Filenfi, the master of his *casa* and his secretary, clad in non-military attire, signaled with a white handkerchief from a balcony. He came out and was led off to the fortress, "under conduct of arms," as they say during wartime, by Anselme Suardo, lieutenant of the magistrates.

Interrogated at once, he said he bore no blame for what had happened, because he had arrived from Venice only on Christmas Eve, having been away several days on the prince's business.

He was asked how many men the prince had with him; he replied, "Twenty or thirty persons."

He was asked for their names, and he said that there were only some eight or ten persons of quality who ate with the prince, as he himself did, and that these were the only ones whose names he knew, but the others—vagabonds who had only recently come to the prince's side—of them he knew nothing.

He named thirteen persons, including the brother of Liveroto.

Soon after this, the artillery placed on the city walls began blasting. Soldiers stationed themselves in the neighboring houses to catch those who fled. The said prince, who had taken the same risks as the two

whose deaths we have recounted, said to those near him that they should hold out until he provided them a written order accompanied by a certain sign; after this, he went and surrendered to that Anselme Suardo who was named above. And given that he could not be taken away in a coach, which had been forbidden because of the great crowds of people and the barricades that had been set up on the streets, it was decided to take him away on foot.

He walked surrounded by the men of Marcel Accoramboni; at his sides were officers of the *condottieri*, Lieutenant Suardo, and other captains and gentlemen of the town. Behind them were a large company of men-at-arms and soldiers of the town. Prince Louis was clad in brown, his stiletto at his side and his cloak carried under his arm in a most elegant manner, muttering disdainfully, "If I had actually fought!" By which he meant that he would have carried the day. Brought before the magistrates, he greeted them and said:

"Signors, I am the prisoner of this gentleman," indicating Signor Anselme, "and I am most annoyed to see what has happened, through no fault of mine."

The captain having ordered that his stiletto be taken away, he then leaned on a balcony and proceeded to trim his fingernails with a small pair of scissors that had been lying there.

He was asked what persons he had in his house; he named, among others, Colonel Liveroto and Count Montemelino, of whom we have already read, adding that he would give 10,000 piastres to bring back the one, and his own blood to bring back the other. He asked to be placed in a room suited to a man such as himself. This having been done, he wrote with his own hand the order to surrender, and he enclosed his ring as a sign. He said to Signor Anselme that he was delivering up to him his sword and his musket, entreating him when

he found those weapons in his house to make use of them for his friendship's sake, as they were the arms of a gentleman and not some vulgar soldier.

The soldiers went into the house, searching it with great care, and called out the roll of the prince's men, who were found to number thirty-four, after which they were conducted, two by two, to the palazzo prison. The dead were left to be prey for dogs, and then a complete report was quickly sent off to Venice.

A number of the soldiers of Prince Louis who were known to have been involved in the crime could not be found; it was forbidden to give them asylum, under pain of having one's house demolished and one's goods confiscated; those who turned one of them in would receive fifty piastres. By these means, many were found.

A frigate was sent from Venice to Candia carrying orders for Signor Latino Orsini to return immediately on a matter of great importance, and people thought he would be stripped of his command.

Yesterday morning, which was the Feast of Saint Stephen, everyone was waiting to see the death of the said Prince Louis or to hear that he had been strangled in prison; anything else would have been a great surprise, for he was not the kind of bird that could be kept in a cage for long. But that night his trial was held, and, a little before dawn on Saint John's Day, it was learned that the said signor had been strangled and that he had made a very good death. His body was transported without delay to the cathedral, accompanied by the clergy from that church and a number of Jesuit priests. He was laid out on a table in the middle of the church all day long, to serve as a spectacle for the people and as a mirror for the inexperienced.

The next day, his body was carried to Venice, as he had requested in his will, and he was buried there.

On the Saturday, they hanged two of his people: the first and the more important was Furio Savorgnano, the other some common man.

On the Monday, the penultimate day of the aforesaid year, thirteen more were hanged, among whom were a number of nobles; two others, one called Captain Spendiano and the other Count Paganello, were taken to the plaza, being lightly tortured on the way; having come to the place of execution, they were beaten, their skulls broken, and they were then torn into quarters, remaining alive throughout. These men were nobles, and before they turned to evil ways, they had been very rich. It was said that Count Paganello was the one who killed Vittoria Accoramboni with that cruelty that has already been described. But it was objected that Prince Louis, in the letter cited earlier, testified that he did the deed with his own hand, but this may have been said out of braggadocio, as when he had had Vitelli assassinated in Rome, or it may have been said to gain more favor from Prince Virginio Orsini.

Count Paganello, before receiving his mortal blow, was stabbed a number of times with a knife below his left breast, in order to touch his heart, as he had done to that poor lady. The result was a veritable torrent of blood from his chest. He lived for another half an hour, to the great astonishment of everyone. He was a man of forty-five years, who showed a great deal of strength.

The supports of the gibbet are still standing, ready to dispatch the nineteen remaining, on the first day that is not a feast day. But because the executioner is very fatigued and the people are in a somewhat miserable state after having seen so many deaths, their execution has been deferred for these two days. No one thinks any of them will be left alive. The only possible exception among the men of Prince Louis is

Signor Felenfi, the master of his *casa*, who is taking all pains possible (and indeed it is a matter of some importance to him) to prove that he had nothing whatsoever to do with the crime.

No one can remember, not even among the oldest here in the city of Padua, a time when, for so just a reason, so many have forfeited their lives on a single occasion, all at once. And these signors (of Venice) have acquired renown and a very good reputation among the most civilized nations.

Added in another hand: François Felenfi, secretary and *maestro di casa*, was condemned to fifteen years in prison. The cupbearer (*copiere*), Onorio Adami de Fermo, along with two others, received one year in prison; seven others were condemned to the galleys in irons, and another seven were released.

THE GENCI

1599



The Don Juan of Molière is an amorous man, no doubt, but above all he is a man among other men, a man who is good company; before giving himself up to that irresistible penchant of his that draws him toward pretty women, he first tries to conform to a certain kind of ideal. He wants to be the kind of man who would be the most admired in the court of a gallant and witty young king.

The Don Juan of Mozart is already closer to the real thing, and less French; he thinks much less of the opinion of others; most importantly, he does not think at all about his public image or appearance, about how he appears, his *parestre*, as the Baron de Faeneste in the tale by d'Aubigné would have put it.¹ We have only two portraits of Don Juan in Italy such as he must have appeared in that fine country in the sixteenth century, at the beginning of the renascence of civilization. Of these two portraits, there is one that I simply cannot mention; our age is too stiff and priggish; I am reminded of the great phrase I often heard Lord Byron use: "this age of cant."² This hypocrisy, so tedious and so ineffective at fooling anyone, has the immense advantage of giving stupid people something to say: they are scandalized when one has dared to say something or when one has dared to laugh at something, etc. The disadvantage is that it severely limits the field of history.

But if the reader has the good taste to permit me, I will present to him, in full humility, a historic account of the second of these Don Juan figures, the one of whom it is possible to speak in 1837; his name was Francesco Cenci.

A Don Juan is possible only because of the world's hypocrisy. In antiquity, a Don Juan was an effect without a cause; religion then was festival, and she exhorted men toward pleasure, so how could she have rejected those creatures who made a certain pleasure their whole pursuit? Only government spoke of abstaining; it forbade those things that could do harm to the nation, which is to say, to the interest of the general public, and not those that could harm only the individual who practiced them.

Every man who had a taste for women and plenty of money, therefore, could be a Don Juan in Athens, and no one would find anything wrong with that; nobody would say that this life is a vale of tears and that there is merit in making ourselves suffer.

I do not believe that the Athenian Don Juan would arrive at the level of actual crime as quickly as the Don Juan of modern monarchies; much of the pleasure of the latter consists in going against popular opinion, and he begins, in his youth, believing that what he is rebelling against is hypocrisy.

To "break the law" under the monarchy of Louis XV, to take a pistol shot at a roofer and make him tumble down from the height of his rooftop—is this not the proof that one lives in the society of a prince, that one sports the best possible tone, and that one laughs at the judge? "Laughing at the judge": is this not the first step, the first attempt made by every little Don Juan at his debut?

Among us, women are no longer in fashion, and this is why Don Juans are rare; but when they were more common, they always began

by seeking out perfectly natural pleasures, all the while boasting of flouting the religious ideas not founded in reason of their contemporaries. It is only later, when he begins to become perverted, that the Don Juan finds a voluptuous pleasure in flouting those opinions that he himself finds just and reasonable.

This transition would have been very difficult among the ancients, and it is only under the Roman emperors, after Tiberius and Capri, that one finds libertines who love corruption for its own sake, that is, for the pleasure of flouting the reasonable opinions of their contemporaries.

Thus, it is to the Christian religion that I attribute the possibility of a satanic role for Don Juan. This is the religion that taught the world that some poor slave, some gladiator, possessed a soul absolutely equal in faculties to that of Caesar himself; thus, we must thank it for the appearance of the more delicate sentiments; but even so, I am sure that those sentiments would have made their appearance in the lives of people sooner or later anyway. *The Aeneid* already has a tenderness quite absent from *The Iliad*.

The philosophy of Jesus was that of the Arab philosophers who were his contemporaries; the only new thing introduced into the world following the principles that Saint Paul preached was a whole corps of priests absolutely separated from the rest of the citizens and even having opposing interests.³

The sole business of this corps was to cultivate and strengthen the "religious sentiment"; they invented distinctions and methods for inspiring the spirits of all classes, from the uneducated shepherd to the aging, blasé courtesan; they knew how to connect the memory of religion to those most charming impressions from earliest childhood; they never let the briefest plague or the least catastrophe pass without

profiting from it by redoubling that "religious sentiment" or by getting a beautiful church built, like the Santa Maria della Salute of Venice.

The existence of this corps produced that wondrous thing, the pope Saint Leon, resisting *with no physical force* the ferocious Attila and his waves of barbarians who had terrorized China, Persia, and the Gauls.

Thus, religion, like that absolute power tempered by songs that we know as the French monarchy,⁴ has produced singular things, things the world would never have seen if it had not been for these two institutions.

Among all things good or bad but always singular or curious, and which would have puzzled Aristotle, Polybius, Augustus, and all the other intelligent folk from antiquity, I put without hesitation the entirely modern character of Don Juan. In my view, it is the product of the ascetic institutions of the popes who came after Luther; for Leo X and his court (1506) followed pretty closely the principles of the religion of Athens.⁵

The *Dom Juan* of Molière was performed at the beginning of the reign of Louis XIV, on February 15, 1665; that king was not yet the sanctimonious man he would become, but nevertheless the ecclesiastical court censored the scene with the beggar in the forest. This was in order to help persuade the young king, so prodigiously ignorant, that the word *Jansenist* was synonymous with *republican*.⁶

The original is by a Spanish writer, Tirso de Molina;⁷ an Italian troupe put on an imitation of his original in Paris around 1664, and it caused a furor. It is probably the most often performed comedy in the world, because it features both the devil and love, the fear of hell-fire and the exalted passion for a woman, that is to say, all that is the

most terrible and the most delightful in the eyes of all men, so long as they are on a level higher than that of the savage.

It is not surprising that Don Juan was first depicted in literature by a Spanish poet. Love occupies a grand place in the life of that people; over there, it is, hands down, the most serious passion, to which one sacrifices all the others including—believe it or not!—that of *vanity*. It is the same in Germany and Italy. All things considered, only France is completely free of this passion, which has made so many foreigners commit so many follies: for example, marrying a poor girl on the pretext that she is pretty and that one is in love with her. Girls who lack beauty do not lack admirers in France; we are a shrewd people. In other countries, they are reduced to becoming nuns, which is why convents are so indispensable in Spain. Girls don't need dowries in that country, and that law has kept love triumphant. In France, love takes refuge up on the fifth floor, that is, among the girls who do not marry with the intervention of the family lawyer.⁸

There is no need to speak at all of the Don Juan of Lord Byron, who is nothing more than a Faublas,⁹ a handsome but insignificant young man against whom all sorts of unlikely pleasures hurl themselves.

Thus, it was in Italy and only in the sixteenth century that this singular character was to appear for the first time. It was in Italy in the seventeenth century that a princess said, while tasting an iced dessert on the evening of a very hot day, "What a pity that this isn't a sin!"

This sentiment, in my view, forms the basis of the character of Don Juan, and as we can see, the Christian religion is essential for it.

Upon this topic an author from Naples exclaims: "Is it nothing to flout Heaven, and to believe that at that very moment Heaven could reduce you to ashes? It is from this that the extreme voluptuous-

ness arises of having a nun for a mistress, and a nun filled with piety, knowing full well that she is doing evil, and passionately imploring God's pardon while she is passionately sinning."¹⁰

Let us imagine an extremely perverse Christian, born in Rome at the time when Pius V had just brought back, or invented, a whole crowd of finicky little practices entirely foreign to that simple morality that considered virtue to be only "that which is useful to men." An inexorable inquisition—so inexorable that it could not last long in Italy but took refuge in Spain—had just been given new strength¹¹ and had everyone terrified. For several years, great penalties were the result of failing to follow, or expressing contempt for, these punctilious little practices elevated now to the level of the most sacred religious duties; our Roman would have shrugged his shoulders at the spectacle of the citizens universally trembling before the terrible laws of the Inquisition.

"Well then," he would have said to himself, "I am the richest man in Rome, capital of the world, and I am going to be the bravest also; I will publicly mock everything that these people respect and that seems so little worthy of respect"; for a Don Juan, in order to be one, must be a man of some courage, a man with a quick, sharp intellect, capable of clearly divining men's motives for their actions.

Francesco Cenci would have said to himself: "By what meaningful actions can I, a Roman born in 1527, precisely during those six months when the Lutheran soldiers of the Bourbon commander were committing the most hideous profanations on holy things—by what actions could I demonstrate my courage and give myself the pleasure of going against public opinion? How can I shock my idiot contemporaries? How can I give myself the intense pleasure of knowing that I am different from this vulgar mob?"

It would never have entered the head of a Roman, and a Roman

of the Middle Ages, to stop himself short at words. There is no country where brave words are more despised than Italy.

The man who dared to say these things to himself was named Francesco Cenci; he was killed in the sight of his daughter and his wife on September 15, 1598. Nothing likable about this Don Juan has come down to us; his character was not sweetened and *diminished* by the idea of being, like Molière's Don Juan, good company above all else. The only time he gave any thought to other men was in making note of his superiority to them, or making use of them in his schemes, or hating them. A Don Juan finds no pleasure in sympathies, in sweet reveries, or in the illusions of a tender heart. What he needs above all are triumphs that can be seen by others, triumphs that *cannot be denied*; what he needs is the long list that the insolent Leporello reads out to the sorrowing Elvire.

The Roman Don Juan carefully avoids the blunder of giving away the key to his character by taking a lackey into his confidence, as Molière's Don Juan does; he lives with no confidant, and the only words he speaks are words that are of use in *furthering his designs*. No one has ever observed in him any of those moments of real tenderness and charming gaiety that lead us to pardon Mozart's Don Juan; in a word, the portrait I am about to paint is hideous.

If the choice had been up to me, I would not have written about this character and would have been content to study him, for the subject is more horrific than curious; but I must admit that I have been asked to by some travel companions whom I cannot refuse. In 1823, I had the pleasure of seeing Italy with these delightful people, and I shall never forget them; I was seduced, as they were, too, by the fine portrait of Beatrice Cenci that can be seen at Rome in the Barberini palazzo.

The gallery there now contains only seven or eight paintings, but

four of them are masterpieces, first among them the portrait of the celebrated Fornarina, Raphael's mistress, painted by himself. This portrait, the authenticity of which admits of no doubt because contemporary copies can be found, is entirely different from the figure that in the Florence gallery is called Raphael's mistress, and the one that was engraved under that title by Morghen. The portrait in Florence is not even by Raphael. In the name of that great painter, would the reader be willing to pardon me this brief digression?

The second precious portrait in the Barberini gallery is by Guido; this is the portrait of Beatrice Cenci from which so many poor engravings have been made.¹² The great painter has hung a bit of insignificant drapery over the throat of Beatrice; he has put a turban on her; he was afraid it would have been following the truth all the way to the horrific to reproduce exactly what she was made to wear for her execution, together with the wild hair of a poor sixteen-year-old girl who had given herself up to despair. The face is sweet and beautiful, the gaze gentle and the eyes very large: they seem to be the eyes of a person who has just been surprised in the act of weeping hot tears. The hair is blond and very lovely. This head has none of that Roman pride, that awareness of her own powers, which one often comes upon in the assured gaze of a "daughter of Tiber," "*di una figlia del Tevere*," as they would say themselves, proudly. Unfortunately, the halftones have turned to a brick red during the long interval of the 238 years that separate us from the catastrophe about to be narrated.

The third portrait in the Barberini gallery is that of Lucrezia Petroni, stepmother to Beatrice and executed along with her. It is the very type of the Roman matron in her beauty and her natural pride.¹³ The features are large and the flesh strikingly white, the eyebrows

black and very pronounced, the gaze both imperious and charged with eroticism. It makes a fine contrast with the sweet, simple, almost German figure of her stepdaughter.

The fourth portrait, brilliant in both its truth and its stunning colors, is one of Titian's masterpieces; it is of a Greek slave who was the mistress of the famous doge Barberigo.

Almost all foreigners who visit Rome come, very early in their tour, to the Barberini gallery; they are called there, women especially, by the portraits of Beatrice Cenci and her stepmother. I have shared in the common curiosity; and, like everyone else, I then sought out permission to read the records of the famous trial. But if you were to get that permission, you would be surprised in reading these records, all in Latin except the responses of the accused, to find almost no exposition of the facts. This is because in Rome in 1599, there was no one who did not already know the facts. I was granted permission to copy out a contemporary narrative; I believed I could present a translation of it without violating any decency; in any case, this translation can be read out loud in front of ladies in 1823. It must be understood that the translator ceases to be faithful when it is no longer possible to be so: the horror of it would overwhelm any interest or curiosity.

The sad role of the pure Don Juan—he who seeks no ideal to conform to and he whose only concern with the opinions of others is to outrage them—is exposed here in all its horror. The excesses of his crimes forced two women to have him killed before their eyes; one of these women was his spouse and the other his daughter, and the reader will find it difficult to decide upon their guilt. Their contemporaries felt they should not have been executed.

I am convinced that the tragedy of *Galeoto Manfredi* (who was killed by his wife, a subject treated by the great poet Monti),¹⁴ along

with so many other domestic tragedies of the fifteenth century that are less well known and scarcely noted in the histories of Italian towns, ended in a scene like that at the castle of Petrella.

What follows is the translation of the contemporary account; it is in Roman Italian and was written on September 14, 1599.

True History

of the death of Giacomo and Beatrice Cenci, and of Lucrezia Petroni, their stepmother, executed for the crime of parricide Saturday last, September 11, 1599, in the reign of our Holy Father the pope Clement VIII, Aldobrandini.

The detestable life lived by Francesco Cenci, born in Rome and one of our richest citizens, has ended in his being led to his downfall. He has drawn down to an early death his sons, strong and brave young men, and his daughter Beatrice, who was led to her own execution (it was four days ago now) and was scarcely sixteen years old but was considered one of the most beautiful girls in the Papal States and of all Italy. News has spread that Signor Guido Reni, a student of that admirable Bologna school, wanted to paint the portrait of the poor Beatrice Friday last, the day before her execution. If that great painter has performed his task as well as he has with other portraits here in the capital, posterity will be able to have some idea of what the beauty of this admirable girl was like. So that posterity will also have some memory of her unparalleled sufferings and the strength with which this truly Roman heart of hers fought against them, I have resolved to write down what I have learned about the acts that led to her death, as well as what I saw on the day of her glorious tragedy.

The persons from whom I have gleaned my information were so placed as to know the most secret circumstances, which remain unknown in Rome even today, even though for the last six weeks the Cenci trial has been the only topic of discussion. I will write with a certain freedom, in the assurance that I shall be able to deposit my *commentary* in a respectable archive and that it will certainly not be read until after my death. My only sorrow lies in having to speak, as truth requires, against the innocence of this poor Beatrice Cenci, adored and respected by everyone who knew her, just as much as her father was hated and detested.

This man to whom, it must be admitted, heaven had given an equally stunning intelligence and eccentricity was the son of Monsignor Cenci, who, under Pius V, Ghislieri, had been elevated to the post of treasurer (minister of finances). That holy pope, entirely preoccupied as we know with his just hatred for heresy and the reestablishment of his splendid Inquisition, had nothing but contempt for the temporal administration of his state, a situation that enabled Monsignor Cenci, who was treasurer for some years before 1572, to find ways to bequeath to that horrible man, his son and the father of Beatrice, a net income of 160,000 piastres (which amounts to about 2.5 million francs in 1837).

Francesco Cenci, apart from this great fortune, also had a reputation in his youth for greater courage and prudence than any other Roman could claim; and this reputation gave him even greater credit with the pope and with the people, and all the more so given that, when criminal actions started to be imputed to him, they were of the kind society finds easy to forgive. Many Romans still remember, with a sense of bitter regret, the freedom of thought and action we enjoyed in the days of Leo X, who was taken from us in 1513,¹⁵ and under

Paul III, who died in 1549. Talk began to circulate, under this latter pope, of this Francesco Cenci and certain singular love affairs that had been brought to their successful conclusions by even more singular methods.

Under Paul III, a time when one could still talk with a certain degree of security, many said that Francesco Cenci was eagerly seeking out bizarre experiences that could give him *peripezie di nuova idea*, new and disturbing sensations; this point is supported by entries in his account books such as this:

“For adventures and *peripezie* in Toscanella, 3,500 piastres (about 60,000 francs in 1837), *e non fu caro* (and not very expensive at that).”

People in the other cities in Italy perhaps do not realize that in Rome, our destiny as well as our way of living will change depending on the character of the reigning pope. Thus, for the thirteen years of the reign of good Pope Gregory XIII, Buoncompagni, everything was permitted in Rome; if you wanted to put a dagger into your enemy and not be arrested for it, you had only to be sure you did it in a quiet, modest fashion. This excess of indulgence was followed by an excess of severity during the five years' reign of the great Sixtus V, of whom it has been said, as it was of the emperor Augustus, he either should never have come or should have stayed forever. In those days, murders and poisonings that had been forgotten for ten years now led to executions—for those who had been unlucky enough to have made their confession to Cardinal Montalto before he became Sixtus V.

It was principally in the reign of Gregory XIII that the talk about Francesco Cenci started to be widespread; he had married a very rich woman, one suited to his high station; she died after having given him seven children. Soon after her death, he took as a second bride Lu-

crezia Petroni, a rare beauty celebrated for the striking whiteness of her complexion, but a little too plump, the common failing of our Roman women. From Lucrezia he had no children.

The lesser vice attributed to Francesco Cenci was a propensity to an infamous form of love,¹⁶ and the greater one was not to believe in God. During his entire life, no one had ever seen him enter a church.

Imprisoned three different times for his infamous affairs, he got himself released by giving 200,000 piastres to people in favor with the twelve successive popes under whom he had lived. (Two hundred thousand piastres would be about 5 million francs in 1837.)

I saw Francesco Cenci only when his hair was already graying, during the reign of the Buoncompagni pope, when everything was permitted to the one who dared. He was a man of about five feet four, well built though a little thin; he had the reputation of being extremely strong, a rumor he may have started himself; his eyes were large and expressive, but the upper eyelid drooped a bit too much; his nose was prominent and overlarge, his lips were thin, and his smile charming. That same smile could become terrible when he fixed his gaze upon his enemies; when something made him upset or irritated, he would tremble excessively, to the point where this physically inconvenienced him. I saw him in my youth, under the Buoncompagni pope, traveling on horseback from Rome to Naples, no doubt in pursuit of one of his little love affairs; he would ride through the forests of San Germano and Fajola with no fear of bandits, and it was said he made the trip in less than twenty hours. He always traveled alone and without telling anyone; when his first horse was fatigued, he would buy or steal another. If anyone raised the slightest difficulty about it, he had no qualms about using his dagger on the man. But it is also true that in the years of my youth, that is to say, when he was

forty-eight or fifty, there was no one courageous enough to try to resist him. His great pleasure was in confronting his enemies.

He was well known along all the roads in the states of His Holiness; he paid generously, but he was also capable, two or three months after some offense had been done him, of dispatching a hired assassin to kill the man responsible.

The only virtuous action he performed in his whole life was to have built a church dedicated to Saint Thomas in the court of his vast palazzo near the Tiber; but he was moved to this fine deed only by the singular desire to have the graves of all his children under his gaze:¹⁷ he hated them with an excessive, unnatural passion from their earliest infancy, when they could not possibly have done anything to have offended him.

"I want them all put there," he would say often, with a bitter laugh, to the workers employed in constructing his church. He sent his three eldest—Giacomo, Cristoforo, and Rocco—to study at the university at Salamanca in Spain. Once they were in a distant land, he took a wicked pleasure in not sending them any money, so that these unfortunate young men, having addressed numerous letters to their father with no response whatever, were reduced to the miserable necessity of returning to their native country by means of borrowing small sums and begging along the way.

In Rome, they found their father even more severe and rigid, more miserly than ever despite his great wealth, unwilling to clothe them or to give them the money necessary to buy the most basic food. They were forced to have recourse to the pope, who forced Francesco Cenci to give them a small allowance. And with this mediocre assistance, they took their leave of him.

Soon after, as a result of one of his infamous affairs, Francesco was

put in prison for the third and final time; at this, the three brothers solicited an audience with our Holy Father the pope at the time, all three pleading with him to have their father, Francesco Cenci, executed, for, they said, he had dishonored their house. Clement VIII was strongly inclined to do it, but he had second thoughts and decided not to placate these unnatural children, and he had them chased shamefully out of his presence.

The father, as we have said, got out of prison by giving a large sum of money to a man with enough power to protect him. It is likely that the strange failed attempt of his three eldest sons only strengthened the hatred he had for his children. He cursed them constantly, the eldest along with the youngest, and every day he used a stick to beat his two poor daughters, who lived with him in the palazzo.

The elder daughter, despite being kept under close surveillance, found a way of presenting a plea to the pope; she entreated His Holiness either to marry her to someone or to place her in a convent. Clement VIII took pity on her suffering and married her to Charles Gabrielli, from the noblest family in Gubbio; His Holiness forced the father to provide her a solid dowry.

Following this unforeseen blow, Francesco Cenci flew into an extreme rage, and to prevent his daughter Beatrice, who was growing up, from getting the idea of imitating her sister, he imprisoned her in one of the apartments of his immense palazzo. There, no one had permission to see Beatrice, who was then scarcely fourteen and already splendid in her ravishing beauty. But above all she had a gaiety, a frankness, and a comic wit that I have never seen in anyone else. Francesco Cenci himself brought her food to her. It was probably then that the monster began to grow amorous, or feigned growing amorous, in order to torture his unfortunate daughter. He often spoke

to her about the perfidious turn her sister had done him and, working himself up into a rage by the sound of his own words, he would end by showering blows upon her.

At this juncture, Rocco Cenci, his son, was killed by a pork butcher, and the following year Cristoforo Cenci was killed by Paolo Corso of Massa. On this occasion, he showed his grim impiety by refusing to give even a copper *baiocco* for the candles. Upon learning of the death of his son Cristoforo, he cried out that he would not know real joy until every last one of his children was buried and that while the last one lay dying, he would set fire to his palazzo as a sign of his happiness. Rome was shocked by this statement, but people believed anything was possible with such a man, whose greatest pride was in scorning the world's opinion, and even that of the pope himself.

(Here it becomes absolutely impossible to follow the Roman narrator in his obscure account of the strange things Francesco Cenci did to shock his contemporaries. His wife and his unfortunate daughter were, to all appearances, made the victims of these abominable acts.)

All these things were not enough for him; he tried with threats and then with force to rape his own daughter Beatrice, who was already grown and beautiful; he felt no shame in going and lying in her bed in a completely nude state. He walked with her through the rooms of the palazzo, entirely nude; then, he brought her into his wife's bed so that, in the lamplight, the poor Lucrezia could see what he was doing with Beatrice.

He taught the poor girl to believe in a terrifying heresy, one I scarcely dare report, to the effect that when a father knows his own daughter, their children are necessarily saints, and that all the greatest saints venerated by the church were born in this fashion—that is, that their maternal grandfather was their father.

When Beatrice resisted his vile wishes, he beat her cruelly, to the point where the poor girl, unable to continue living so miserable a life, had the idea of following her sister's example. She addressed a fully detailed complaint to our Holy Father the pope; but apparently Francesco Cenci had taken precautions, because it appears that this entreaty never reached the hands of His Holiness; in any case, it could not be found in the secretariat of the *Memoriali* when, Beatrice being in prison, her defender had the most urgent need of this article, for it could have served as some proof of the unheard-of excesses that were practiced in the Petrella castle. Would it not have been evident to all that Beatrice had been in need of some legitimate defense? This memorial also was signed with the name of Lucrezia, the stepmother of Beatrice.

Francesco Cenci found out about this initiative, and one can imagine with what rage he redoubled the ill treatment of these two unfortunate women.

Life having become absolutely intolerable, and the women having found that they could hope for nothing from the justice of the sovereign, whose courtiers were corrupted by the rich gifts of Francesco, they conceived the idea that was to be their undoing but even so still had this advantage: it would put an end to their sufferings in this world.

The reader must understand that the famous Monsignor Guerra often came to the Cenci palazzo; he was tall and a handsome man as well, and he had received one special gift from destiny, that whatever thing he attempted, he succeeded, and did so with a grace that was all his own. Some have thought that he loved Beatrice and that he was planning to abandon the *manteletta* and marry her,¹⁸ but despite his efforts to hide his feelings as carefully as possible, he was loathed

by Francesco, who reproached him for being in league with his children. When Monsignor Guerra learned that Signor Cenci was away from the palazzo, he went up to the women's apartment and spent several hours talking with them, listening to their complaints about the unbelievable mistreatments heaped upon the two of them. It appears that Beatrice was the first to speak plainly to Monsignor Guerra about the plan they had arrived at. After a time, he gave them his hands; and, repeatedly and vigorously entreated by Beatrice, he at last consented to communicate this strange plan to Giacomo Cenci, without whose consent they could do nothing, given that he was the elder brother and the head of the house after Francesco.

They found it very easy to attract him to the conspiracy; he had been extremely mistreated by his father, who never gave him any financial help, a point which had become sorer now that Giacomo was married, with six children. They decided to meet in Monsignor Guerra's apartment and discuss possible means of killing Francesco Cenci. The business was treated with all appropriate formalities, and the votes of the stepmother and the young girl were taken on every point. Ultimately, they decided to use two of Francesco Cenci's vassals, both of whom had conceived a mortal hatred for him. One was called Marzio; a man of courage, and one who had been strongly attached to the unfortunate children of Francesco, and in order to do something good for them, he consented to take part in the parricide. Olympio, the second, had been named chatelain of the Petrella fortress in the kingdom of Naples because of his powerful standing with Prince Colonna, but Francesco Cenci had managed to get rid of him.

The two men agreed to everything; Francesco Cenci having announced that in order to avoid the unhealthy air of Rome, he was go-

ing to spend the next summer in that Petrella fortress, they had the idea of recruiting a dozen Neapolitan bandits. Olympio took it upon himself to furnish them. They decided that the bandits would be hidden in the forest near Petrella and that they would be informed the minute Francesco Cenci was on the path; they would then abduct him on the road and announce to the family that he would be freed as soon as they paid a large ransom. The children would then be obliged to travel back to Rome to get the money the bandits demanded; they would pretend to have trouble raising the money quickly enough, and the bandits, following through on their threats when no money was forthcoming, would put Francesco Cenci to death. In this way, no one would be led to suspect the real authors of the murder.

But when summer came and Francesco Cenci departed from Rome to Petrella, the spy who was supposed to deliver word of his departure was too late in notifying the bandits hidden in the forest, and they did not have time to get down to the high road. Cenci arrived at Petrella with no trouble; the bandits, tired of waiting for what seemed a doubtful prey, went elsewhere to steal for themselves.

Cenci, for his part, being a shrewd and suspicious old man, never set foot outside the fortress. And, his bad temper worsening with the infirmities of age, which were intolerable to him, he increased the atrocious mistreatments to which he made the two poor women submit. He accused them of taking pleasure in his increasing weakness.

Beatrice, pushed to the breaking point by the horrible things she had to endure, called Marzio and Olympio to the walls outside the fortress. During the night, while her father slept, she spoke to them from a low window and threw letters down to them addressed to Monsignor Guerra. By means of these letters, it was agreed that Mon-

signor Guerra would promise Marzio and Olympio 1,000 piastres if they would take it upon themselves to kill Francesco Cenci. A third of the sum was to be paid by Monsignor Guerra at Rome in advance, and the other two-thirds by Lucrezia and Beatrice when, the thing having been done, they would be in charge of Cenci's strongbox.

They settled on doing the thing on the day of the Nativity of the Virgin, and to that end the two men were admitted into the fortress clandestinely. But Lucrezia balked when she thought about the respect due to the Madonna's feast day, and she talked Beatrice into deferring it for a day so as not to commit a double sin.

Thus, it was September 9, 1598, in the evening, that mother and daughter dexterously gave opium to Francesco Cenci, and he fell into a deep sleep.

Toward midnight, Beatrice herself let Marzio and Olympio into the fortress; then, she and Lucrezia conducted them to the old man's bedroom, where he was sunk in sleep. There they left the two men so that they could do what had been agreed upon, and the two women went into the neighboring room to wait. But then, suddenly, they saw the two men enter looking very pale and beside themselves.

"What news?" they cried.

"It is a base thing, and a shameful one," they replied, "to kill a poor old man in his sleep! We were overcome by pity."

Listening to this excuse, Beatrice was seized with indignation, and she began to insult them, saying:

"So, you two men, so ready for anything, you haven't the courage to kill a man who's sleeping!¹⁹ And you would never dare to face him if he were awake! And you dare to take our money for this! Very well: since your cowardice forces me, I'll kill my father myself; and as for you, you won't live for very long either!"

Animated by these angry words and fearing some diminution in the price that had been agreed upon, the assassins reentered the bed-chamber, followed by the women. One of them held up a thick nail just over the eye of the sleeping old man; the other used a hammer to drive it into his head. They hammered another one into his throat so that his weakened soul, so weighed down by his recent sins, was snatched out by devils; the body fought back, but in vain.

The thing being done, the daughter gave Olympio a fat purse full of money; she gave Marzio a woolen cloak with a gold stripe, which had belonged to her father, and she sent them on their way.

The two women, alone now, began by removing the great nail pounded into the head of the corpse, and the one in the neck; then, having wrapped the body in a bedsheet, they dragged it along a long corridor until they came to a gallery that opened onto a little abandoned garden. From there, they threw the corpse into a great mulberry tree that grew below in that solitary spot. Because there was a commode at one end of the gallery, they hoped that when the body was discovered in the morning hanging tangled in the tree branches, people would assume he had slipped and fallen on his way to the commode.

Things happened exactly as foreseen. In the morning when the corpse was discovered, there was a great hubbub in the fortress; the women did not fail to cry out and to weep for the unhappy death of a father and a spouse. But though the young Beatrice had the courage of offended modesty, she did not have the prudence necessary in life; early in the morning, she gave a bloodstained sheet to one of the laundresses in the fortress, telling her not to be surprised at the quantity of blood, because during the night she had suffered from an exceptionally heavy flow; all was well, for the moment.

Francesco Cenci was given an honorable funeral, and the women returned to Rome, enjoying the tranquillity they had sought in vain for so long. They assumed their happiness would go on forever, for they did not know what was happening at Naples.

The justice of God, unwilling to allow so atrocious a parricide to go unpunished, saw to it that when the story of what had happened in the fortress became known in Rome, the chief judge felt some misgivings, and he sent a royal commissioner to inspect the body and to arrest any suspects.

The royal commissioner had everyone in the fortress arrested. They were all brought to Naples in chains, and nothing suspicious arose from their depositions except for that of the laundress, who told of Beatrice giving her one or more bloodstained bedsheets. She was asked if Beatrice had tried to explain those large bloodstains; she replied that Beatrice had spoken of a natural indisposition. She was asked if bloodstains of that size could have come from such an indisposition; she replied no, that the redness of the stains was too bright.

These facts were sent on immediately to the judge in Rome, but nonetheless, several months passed before anyone among us here dreamed of arresting the children of Francesco Cenci. Lucrezia, Beatrice, and Giacomo could have saved themselves a thousand times, whether by going to Florence under the pretext of some pilgrimage or by setting off for Civita Vecchia; but God denied them such a saving inspiration.

Monsignor Guerra, hearing what was taking place in Naples, immediately sent men to kill Marzio and Olympio; but only Olympio could be found, and he was killed at Terni. The Neapolitan judge had had Marzio arrested and taken to Naples, where he immediately admitted everything.

This terrible deposition was quickly sent to the judge in Rome, who decided to have Giacomo and Bernardo Cenci, the only surviving sons of Francesco, arrested and taken to the prison of Corte Savella, along with his wife, Lucrezia. Beatrice was being held in the palazzo of her father by a large troupe of *sbirri*. Marzio was brought to Naples and also placed in the Savella prison; there, he was confronted with the two women, who consistently denied everything, and Beatrice specifically denied recognizing the striped cloak she had given to Marzio. The latter, inspired with admiration for the great beauty and stunning eloquence of the girl as he watched her responding to the judge, now denied everything that he had admitted at Naples. He was put to torture, but he admitted nothing, preferring to die in his torments as a fitting homage to the beauty of Beatrice.

Following the death of this man, the matter remaining unproved, the judges did not find sufficient cause to put either the two sons of Cenci or the two women to torture. All four were taken to the Castel Sant'Angelo, where they spent four months quite peacefully.

Everything seemed to be coming to an end, and no one in Rome any longer doubted that this girl, so beautiful and so courageous, who had inspired such keen interest, would soon be given her liberty, when, unluckily, the man who had murdered Olympio was arrested; taken to Rome, the man admitted to everything.

Monsignor Guerra, so surprisingly compromised by this man's testimony, was subpoenaed without delay; prison was certain, and death probable. But this remarkable man, endowed by fate with the ability to do everything well, managed to save himself in a near-miraculous manner. He was the best-looking man at the papal court, known so well throughout Rome that escape would be impossible; in any case, the gates were strongly guarded, and his house had

probably been under surveillance from the moment the summons was issued. It is important to know also that he was very tall, with a very light complexion and a fine blond beard, and with a fine head of the same-colored hair.

With incredible swiftness, he got hold of a coal merchant, took the man's clothes, had his head and beard shaved, tinted his complexion, bought two donkeys, and began to wander the streets of Rome selling coal and limping as he went. He put on a wonderful air of grossness and stupidity, crying out to sell his coal while his mouth was full of bread and onions, as hundreds of *shirri* were searching not only within Rome but also along all the roadways. Eventually, when the sight of him was well enough known to the *shirri*, he dared exit Rome, always whipping his two donkeys ahead of him weighted down with coal. He encountered numerous groups of *shirri*, none of whom bothered to stop him. Since then, only one single letter has come from him; his mother sent some money for him to Marseille, and everyone assumes he went to war in France as a soldier.

The confession of the assassin from Terni and the flight of Monsignor Guerra, which produced a stunning sensation in Rome, brought back to life all the suspicions and all the clues pointing to the Cenci's guilt, so they were taken from the Castel Sant'Angelo and returned to the Savella prison.

The two brothers, when put to torture, were far from imitating the noble soul of the brigand Marzio; they were weak enough to admit everything. Signora Lucrezia Petroni had been so accustomed to the softness and ease of great luxury, and she was not physically strong to begin with, that she could not endure the ordeal of the "rope"; she told everything she knew.

But this was not the case with Beatrice Cenci, that girl so full of

life and bravery. Neither the kind words nor the threats of the judge Moscati had any result. She endured the torments of the rope without a hint of change and with a perfect courage. The judge could do nothing to induce any response that would compromise her in the slightest; moreover, with her inner strength and spirit, she completely confounded that famous judge Ulysse Moscati, the chief interrogator. He was so surprised by the way this girl behaved that he decided to make a full report to His Holiness Clement VIII, fortunately reigning at that time.

His Holiness wanted to see and study all the trial reports. He feared that the judge, Ulysse Moscati, so famous for his deep science and his superior wisdom, had been vanquished by the beauty of Beatrice and had spared her in his interrogations. As a result, His Holiness removed him from his position of directing the trial and put matters in the hands of another, more severe judge. And in fact this barbarian had the courage to torture that beautiful body pitilessly, submitting her to *torturam capillorum* (that is, Beatrice was interrogated while hanged by her hair).²⁰

While she was hanging from the rope, this new judge had her stepmother and her brothers brought in. As soon as Giacomo and Lucrezia saw her:

“The sin has been committed,” they cried; “and now the penance is due; do not let your body be torn apart through a vain stubbornness.”

“So you want to cover our family in shame,” the girl replied, “and die in disgrace? You are making a grave mistake; but since you want it this way, let it be.”

And then, turning toward the *sbirri*:

“Let me down,” she said to them, “and let me read my mother’s

deposition. I will admit to what must be admitted, and deny what must be denied.”

And so it was done; she admitted everything that was true.²¹ The chains were removed from all of them, and because it had been five months since she had seen her brothers, she wanted to dine with them, and the four of them enjoyed a happy day together.

But on the following day, they were separated again; the two brothers were taken to the prison in Tordinona, and the women remained at Savella. Our Holy Father the pope, having seen the formal document containing their admissions of guilt, ordered that without delay they should be attached to the tails of wild horses and thereby torn to death.

All Rome shuddered at learning of this harsh sentence. A large number of cardinals and princes went and got down on their knees before the pope, begging him to allow these miserable ones to present their defense.

“And did they give their aged father a chance to present his defense?” replied the pope indignantly.

Finally, by special grace he accorded them a reprieve of twenty-five days. And then the premier lawyers in Rome began to write up their pleas in this case that had filled all Rome with anguish and pity. On the twenty-fifth day, they all appeared together before His Holiness. Nicolo De’Angelis was the first to speak; but he had got no further than the opening lines of his defense when Clement VIII interrupted:

“So,” he exclaimed, “in Rome there are not only people who kill their fathers but lawyers who will defend them!”

Everyone remained silent, until Farinacci was bold enough to raise his voice.

“Most Holy Father,” he said, “we are not here to defend the crime

but to prove, if we can, that one or several of these unfortunates are innocent of the crime."

The pope signaled him to continue, and he spoke for three solid hours, after which the pope took all their depositions and dismissed them. As they were leaving, Altieri walked behind the group; he was afraid of being compromised, and he turned and got down on his knees before the pope, saying:

"I have no choice but to appear in this case, being advocate for the poor."

To which the pope replied:

"We are shocked not by you but by the others."

The pope did not want to go to bed, instead spending the night reading the lawyers' pleas, assisted in the task by the cardinal of San Marcello; His Holiness seemed greatly touched that so many had conceived some hope for the lives of the unfortunates. In order to save the sons, the lawyers had put the entire guilt on Beatrice. Because it had been repeatedly proved during the hearing that her father had used force in his criminal designs on her, the lawyers hoped that she might be pardoned for the murder, as in a case of self-defense; and if this were the case, with the principal actor in the crime being pardoned, how could her brothers, who had been seduced into it by her, be given a death sentence?

After that night spent on his duties as a judge, Clement VIII ordered that the accused be returned to prison and held in secret confinement. This circumstance gave great hopes to the Roman observers, who always focused entirely on Beatrice. There was an allegation that she had been in love with Monsignor Guerra but had never transgressed against the strictest rules of virtue: thus, no one could, with any justice at all, impute to her the crimes of a monster,

and now she was to be punished simply for defending herself! What would they all say if she had consented? Did human justice require the worsening of the misery of a creature so amiable, so worthy of pity, and already so unhappy? After a life so sad that by the time she was sixteen she had already experienced every kind of misery, did she not deserve a few less hideous days? Everyone in Rome took up her defense. Would she not have been pardoned if, the very first time Francesco Cenci attempted his crimes with her, she had stabbed him right then?

Pope Clement VIII was a good man and a merciful one. We began to hope that he was a little ashamed of the way he had interrupted the lawyers, and that he would pardon someone who repelled violence with violence not, it is true, at the moment of the very first crime but when it was attempted on her again. All Rome was in anxiety over the matter when the pope received word of the violent death of the Marchesa Costanza Santa Croce. Her son Paolo Santa Croce had just killed the woman, aged sixty years, because she would not agree to let him inherit her entire holdings. The report added that Santa Croce had fled and that there was little hope of capturing him. The pope recalled the fratricide of the Massimi not so very long before.²² Disgusted by the frequency of these murders within families, His Holiness felt a pardon was not permissible. When he received the fatal report concerning Santa Croce, the pope was in the palazzo at Monte-Cavallo, on September 6, in order to be nearby the next morning to the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, where he was to consecrate a German cardinal as a bishop.

On that Friday, at ten o'clock, he had Ferrante Taverna,²³ the governor of Rome, summoned, and these are the exact words he said to him:

“We place the Cenci business in your hands, so that justice may be done, and done without delay.”

The governor returned to his palazzo very moved by the command he had just been given; he formally ordered the death sentence and convened an assembly to determine the method of execution.

Saturday morning, September 11, 1599, the leading gentlemen of Rome, members of the *confortatori* confraternity,²⁴ went to the two prisons, the Corte Savella, where Beatrice and her stepmother were held, and Tordinona, where Giacomo and Bernardo Cenci were. All during the night between Friday and Saturday, the Roman gentlemen who knew what was afoot had spent the entire time going back and forth between the palazzo of Monte-Cavallo and those of the principal cardinals, trying to obtain an agreement that the women at least would be put to death behind the prison walls and not have to be taken to the disgrace of the public scaffold; and that mercy might be obtained for young Bernardo Cenci, who, barely fifteen years old, had not admitted to knowing anything of the crime. The noble Cardinal Sforza was especially distinguished by his zealous efforts in the course of that fatal night, but, powerful prince though he was, he was unable to obtain any concession. The crime of Santa Croce was a vile one, committed for the sake of getting money, and the crime of Beatrice was committed for the sake of honor.

While the most powerful cardinals were making so many futile efforts, Farinacci, our great legal expert, was audacious enough to manage to get in to see the pope; once arrived before His Holiness, this stunning man was able to touch his conscience, and at last, through many entreaties, he gained the life of Bernardo Cenci.

When the pope made this great declaration, it may have been four

o'clock in the morning (that is, the morning of Saturday, September 11). All night long, workers had been busy on the piazza of the Ponte Sant'Angelo, making the necessary preparations for the cruel tragedy. However, all the required copies of the death sentence were not ready until five o'clock, and so it was only at six that they could announce the fatal news to the poor unfortunates, who had been sleeping peacefully.

The girl, for the first few moments, could not summon up the strength even to get dressed. She cried out with long, piercing shrieks as she dressed herself all alone in the most fearful despair.

"How is this possible? Oh God!" she cried. "Must I die suddenly like this?"

Lucrezia Petroni, on the other hand, uttered only the most appropriate things; first she prayed on her knees, and then exhorted her daughter to come with her to the chapel, where they could both ready themselves for the great passage from life to death.

The phrase restored all her tranquillity to Beatrice; just as extravagantly and impulsively as she had behaved at first, now she was as wise and reasonable as her stepmother, who had recalled that great soul to herself. From that moment on, she was a mirror of steadfastness, admired by all of Rome.

She requested a notary to make her will, and the request was granted. She asked for her body to be buried in San Pietro in Montorio; she left 300,000 francs to the Stimato (the nuns of the Order of the Stigmata of Saint Francis); the sum was to provide for a dowry for fifteen poor girls. This example touched Signora Lucrezia, who also made her will, calling for her body to be taken to San Giorgio; and she left 500,000 francs as alms for that church, as well as making other pious legacies.

At eight o'clock they both confessed, attended Mass, and received Holy Communion. But before leaving for Mass, Signora Beatrice reflected that it would not be right to appear on the scaffold, before the eyes of the people, wearing the rich clothes that she had on. She called for two dresses, one for herself and the other for her mother. These dresses were like those worn by the nuns, with no ornaments at the neckline or shoulders and simply pleated, with wide sleeves. The mother's dress was of plain black cotton; that of the daughter was of blue taffeta, tied around the waist with a thick rope.

When the dresses were brought in to them, Beatrice, who had been on her knees, got up and said to Signora Lucrezia:

"My mother, the hour of our passion is here; it is time for us to prepare, to put on these other clothes; let us render each other the service of helping to get dressed for one last time."

On the piazza of the Ponte Sant'Angelo, a great scaffold had been erected, with a block and a *mannaja* (a kind of guillotine). At eight o'clock in the morning, the company of the Misericordia carried their great crucifix to the prison gates. Giacomo Cenci was the first to leave his prison; he knelt devoutly on the threshold, said his prayer, and kissed the holy wounds on the crucifix. He was followed by Bernardo Cenci, his younger brother, who also had his hands tied and a small plank fixed over his eyes. The crowd was enormous, and there was some tumult because of a vase that had fallen from a window almost onto the head of one of the penitents, who was holding aloft a lighted torch beside the banner.

Everyone was staring at the two brothers when suddenly and unexpectedly the *fiscal* of Rome came forward, saying:

"Signor Bernardo, our lord has granted you the grace of life; submit to accompany your relatives, and pray to God for them."

At that moment, the two *confortatori* removed the plank from before his eyes. The executioner situated Giacomo Cenci in the cart and removed his clothing, so that he could submit to the *tenailler*.²⁵ When the executioner turned to Bernardo, he verified the signature of the reprieve, untied him, and removed the manacles, and because he had already been undressed in readiness for the torture, the executioner now helped him up onto the cart and put a rich woolen cloak with a golden stripe over his shoulders (people said it was the same one that Beatrice had given to Marzio after the act in the Petrella fortress). The immense crowd in the street, at the windows, and on the rooftops were all moved by this, and a low, deep murmuring could be heard as people passed on the news that the child had found mercy.

The chanting of the Psalms now began, and the procession moved slowly past the Navona Piazza on the way to the Savella prison. When they arrived at the gate, the banner halted, the two women came out, made their adoration at the foot of the holy crucifix, and then proceeded, one after the other, on foot. They were dressed as previously described, their heads covered by large taffeta veils that hung down almost to the waist.

Signora Lucrezia, in her status as widow, wore a black veil and black velvet slippers without heels, as is the custom.

The daughter's veil was of blue taffeta, like her dress; she also had a large veil of silver cloth over her shoulders, a violet cloth underskirt, and white velvet slippers, elegantly laced and fastened with crimson straps. Walking along in those clothes, she evinced a singular grace, and tears sprang to every eye when people saw her advancing slowly in the rear of the procession.

Both women had their hands free, but their arms were tied close to their bodies so that each of them could carry a crucifix; each held

hers close to her eyes. The sleeves of their dresses were very wide so that their arms could be glimpsed, covered by tight sleeves down to the wrists, as is the custom here.

Signora Lucrezia, whose heart was the less steady, was weeping almost continuously; the young Beatrice, on the other hand, showed great courage, and, turning her eyes toward each church as the procession passed them, she went down on her knees for a moment and said in a firm voice, "Adoremus te, Christe!"

Meanwhile, the poor Giacomo Cenci was being torn by the pin-cers on the cart, where he showed great perseverance.

The procession could cross the piazza of the Ponte Sant'Angelo only with great difficulty, so great was the number of carriages and the size of the crowd. They first took the women into the chapel that had been prepared there, and then brought in Giacomo Cenci.

Young Bernardo, wearing his striped cloak, was taken directly to the scaffold, at which point everyone thought that he was going to die and that he had not been pardoned. The poor child was so terrified that he fainted as soon as he set foot on the scaffold. They revived him with cold water and sat him down facing the *mannaja*.

The executioner went to seek out Signora Lucrezia Petroni; her hands were tied behind her back, and she no longer had a veil on her shoulders. She appeared on the piazza accompanied by the banner, her head covered with a black taffeta veil; there, she made her reconciliation with God, and she kissed the holy wounds. They told her to leave her slippers on the pavement; because she was a heavy woman, she ascended the scaffold with difficulty. When she got there and they removed her black taffeta veil, she suffered greatly at being seen with her shoulders and chest uncovered; she looked down at herself, then looked at the *mannaja*, and, in a sign of resignation, she gently

shrugged her shoulders; tears streaming from her eyes, she said, "Oh my God! . . . And you, my brothers, pray for my soul."

Not knowing what she was supposed to do, she asked Alessandro, the primary executioner, how to proceed. He told her to sit astride the block, as if on horseback. But this seemed offensive to her sense of modesty, and it took her a long time to manage it. (The details that follow are tolerable to the Italian public, who like to know things with the greatest precision possible; it will suffice the French reader to know that the modesty of this poor woman meant that she injured her bosom; the executioner showed the head to the people and then wrapped it up in the veil of black taffeta.)

While they were putting the *mannaja* in order for the daughter, a scaffold overloaded with curious onlookers collapsed, and a great number of people were killed. They thus appeared in God's sight before Beatrice did.

When Beatrice saw the banner return to the chapel to come for her, she said in a strong voice:

"Is my mother then really dead?"

They told her yes; she threw herself down on her knees before the crucifix and prayed fervently for her soul. Then she spoke aloud, and at length, to the crucifix:

"Lord, you have returned for me, and I will follow you with a good will, never despairing of your mercy for my enormous sin," etc.

She then recited several Psalms and prayers, all in praise of God. When at last the executioner appeared before her with a rope, she said:

"Tie up this body that must be punished, and untie this soul that must come to immortality and eternal glory."

Then she arose, said her prayer, left her slippers at the foot of the

stair and, mounting onto the scaffold, she swiftly passed one leg over the block, posed her neck beneath the *mannaja*, and arranged her body perfectly so as to avoid being touched by the executioner. She did all this so quickly that she avoided the moment when the taffeta veil would be removed and the public would see her shoulders and chest. The blow of the blade was a long time in coming because of some delay. During this time, she called out the names of Jesus Christ and the most holy Virgin.²⁶ At the fatal moment, her body made a great jolting motion. Poor Bernardo Cenci, who all this time was seated on the scaffold, fell into a faint a second time, and this time it took the *confortatori* a full half hour to revive him. Then Giacomo Cenci was brought up onto the scaffold; but here we must pass over the details, which are too atrocious. Giacomo Cenci was bludgeoned (*mazzolato*).²⁷

Bernardo was immediately removed to the prison; he had a high fever, and they bled him.

As for the poor women, each was placed in her coffin and set down a few steps from the scaffold, near the statue of Saint Paul that is the first one to the right on the Ponte Sant'Angelo. They remained there until four fifteen in the afternoon. Around each coffin burned four candles of white wax.

Then, together with what was left of Giacomo Cenci, they were brought to the palazzo of the consul of Florence. At nine fifteen in the evening,²⁸ the body of the daughter, dressed again in her own clothes and crowned with a profusion of flowers, was taken to San Pietro in Montorio. Her beauty was ravishing; an observer would have said she was asleep. She was interred before the great altar and the *Transfiguration* by Raphael. Accompanying her were fifty large candles burning, and all the Franciscans in Rome.

Lucrezia Petroni was taken, at ten o'clock in the evening, to the church of San Giorgio. All during this tragedy, the crowds were innumerable; as far as the eye could see, the streets were packed with carriages and people, and the curious were everywhere—scaffolding, windows, rooftops. The sun was so hot that day that many people passed out. An enormous number came down with fever; and when everything was finished, about one forty-five in the morning, and the crowd had dispersed, many people were suffocated, and others trampled by horses. The number of deaths was very considerable.

Signora Lucrezia Petroni was rather short, and although she was fifty years old, she was still very good-looking. She had very beautiful features, with a small nose, black eyes, and a very white complexion with beautiful tints; her hair was not thick, and it was chestnut in color.

Beatrice Cenci, who inspires infinite regret, was just sixteen; she was petite; her figure was pretty and rounded, and her cheeks were dimpled, so when she was dead, one would have said she was asleep, and even that she was laughing, which she frequently did when she was alive. She had a small mouth, and her hair was blond and naturally curly. As she walked to her death, those blond curls drifted forward over her face, giving her a certain grace and arousing compassion.

Giacomo Cenci was short, stout, with a white complexion and a black beard; he was just about twenty-six when he died.

Bernardo Cenci closely resembled his sister, and because he wore his hair long as she did, when he appeared on the scaffold many people thought it was she.

The sun had been so hot that many of the spectators of the tragedy died overnight, among them Ubaldino Ubaldini, a young man of

rare beauty who had always enjoyed perfect health. He was the brother of Signor Renzi, well known in Rome. Thus, the shades of the Cenci went into the afterlife well accompanied.

Yesterday, which was Tuesday, September 14, 1599, the penitents of San Marcello employed their privilege to free Signor Bernardo Cenci from prison; he is obliged to pay 400,000 francs to the Santissima Trinita del Ponte Sisto.

(Added in another hand): From him are descended the Francesco and Bernardo Cenci who are alive today.

The famous Farinacci, who saved the life of the young Cenci through his stubborn determination, has published his pleadings. He includes only an extract from pleading number 66, which he presented to Clement VIII in favor of the Cenci. This pleading, in Latin, occupies six large pages, which I cannot copy here, regretfully; it reveals the way people thought in 1599; it seems very sensible to me. Long after the year 1599, Farinacci, sending his papers to the printer, added a note to the pleading relating to the Cenci: *Omnes fuerunt ultimo supplicio affecti except Bernardo qui ad triremes cum bonorum confiscatione condemnatus fuit, ac etiam ad interessendum aliorum morti prout interfuit.*²⁹ The end of this Latin note is touching, but I imagine that the reader is tired of this long story.

THE DUCHESS OF PALLIANO

PALERMO, JULY 22, 1838



I am by no means a naturalist, and my command of Greek is mediocre; my main aim in traveling in Sicily was not to observe phenomena associated with Mount Etna, nor was it to shed light for myself or for others on what the ancient Greek authors had to say about Sicily. My main goal was to see beautiful sights, and such sights are considerable in this extraordinary place. People say it resembles Africa, but the one thing certain for me is that it resembles Italy only in its overwhelming passions. You could say that, for many Sicilians, the word *impossible* does not exist for them when they are inflamed by love or by hatred, and the hatred in this beautiful country never arises out of mere money matters.

I note that in England and even more in France, people refer to "Italian passion," meaning that unbridled passion which one finds in the Italy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In our day, that fine passion is dead, entirely dead, at least among those classes who have let themselves become tainted by French customs and the ways things are done in Paris or London.

I know of course that one can say that, around the time of

Charles V (1530), Naples, Florence, and even Rome tended to imitate the ways of the Spanish; but those grand, noble social customs—did they not arise out of the infinite respect that any man worthy of the name ought to have for the movements of his soul? Far from excluding energy, they exaggerated it, whereas the primary maxim of those smug dolts who imitated the Duke de Richelieu¹ around 1760 was to never appear to be moved by anything. And isn't it the maxim of the English "dandies," which is the model to be imitated now in Naples in preference to the French version, to appear to be bored by everything, superior to everything?

Thus, that "Italian passion" is no longer to be found, nor has it been for over a century now, in the better society of this country.

In order to get some idea of this "Italian passion" that our novelists speak about with such assurance, I found it necessary to study history; and I found that the great histories written by men of talent, though often quite majestic, say almost nothing about such details. They tend to take note only of the follies committed by kings or princes. I had recourse to the histories of individual cities, but I was frightened off by the sheer abundance of materials. A given small town will proudly present you with its history in three or four quarto volumes, along with seven or eight manuscript volumes, the latter all but indecipherable, strewn with abbreviations, representing the letters in odd ways, and, at the most interesting moments, filled with local idioms and figures of speech that would be unintelligible to anyone living twenty leagues away. This is because, throughout that beautiful Italy, where love has given rise to so many tragic events, only three cities—Florence, Siena, and Rome—speak the same way that they write; everywhere else, the written speech differs from the spoken by a hundred leagues.

What is called “Italian passion,” that is, the kind of passion that seeks out its own satisfaction, as opposed to the kind that seeks out only making our neighbors admire us—this Italian passion arose along with the early Renaissance, in the twelfth century, and it died out, at least among polite society, somewhere around 1734. That was when the Bourbons came to reign in Naples in the person of Don Carlos, the son of a Farnese whose second marriage was to Philippe V, that melancholic grandson of Louis XIV, so intrepid when the bullets flew, so bored, and so passionate about music. We know that for twenty-four years, the sublime castrato Farinelli² sang to him the same three favorite songs—always the same ones.

Someone with a philosophic turn of mind might find the details about a passion in Rome or Naples interesting, but I must say that nothing seems more absurd to me than those novels which give their characters Italian names. Can we not agree that the passions change with every hundred leagues northward traveled? Is love the same thing in Marseilles that it is in Paris? The most we can say is that countries that have long been under the same form of government all have a sort of external resemblance in their social customs.

Landscapes, passions, music—they all change with every three or four degrees north. A Neapolitan landscape would appear absurd in Venice if it had not already been agreed that nature is beautiful around Naples. In Paris, we go one better, believing that every forest and field is absolutely the same in Naples and Venice, and we wish that Canaletto, for example, would have used the very same colors that Salvator Rosa did.

But the height of absurdity is when we find an English lady, endowed with all the perfections of her island home, feeling forbidden to write about “hatred” and “love” in that island of hers: thus, we see

Madame Anne Radcliffe giving Italian names and grand passions to the characters of her celebrated novel *The Italian; or, The Confessional of the Black Penitents*.³

I will not attempt to add any graces to simplicity, to the harsh, sometimes shocking quality of the all too true tale I am about to submit to my indulgent reader; for example, I shall translate precisely the response that the Duchess of Palliano made to the declaration of love made to her by her cousin Marcel Capece. This monograph concerning a family was found, I do not know why, at the end of the second volume of a manuscript history of Palermo, about which I can offer no detail.

The narration, which I shall abridge considerably to my great regret (I must suppress a whole host of fascinating circumstances), involves the last adventures of the unlucky Carafa family, rather than being an interesting tale of a single passion. My literary vanity whispers to me that perhaps I might augment the interest of certain situations by developing them somewhat—that is, by inferring and then reporting to the reader the details of what the characters thought and felt. But I, being a young Frenchman born in the north, in Paris—can I really be sure I can correctly infer what Italian minds thought and felt in 1559? The best I can hope for is to divine what might appear elegant and piquant to French readers in 1838.

That passionate kind of feeling that dominated Italy around 1559 requires action, not words. Thus, there will be very few conversations in the narrative that follows. This is a disadvantage for my translation, accustomed as we are nowadays to long conversations between the characters in our novels; for them, a conversation is like combat. This story, for which I request the reader's indulgence, reveals a unique oddity that the Spanish introduced into Italian customs. I shall not

go beyond the role of a translator in any way. The faithful reproduction of the way people felt in the sixteenth century, and even the ways of this storyteller—who to all appearances would seem to have been a gentleman attached to the house of the unfortunate Duchess of Palliano—these make up the whole merit of this tragic story, if indeed there is any merit to it at all.

The most severe Spanish etiquette reigned at the court of the Duke of Palliano. The reader should recall that every cardinal, every Roman prince, had a similar court, and you may then form some idea of the spectacle that made up, in 1559, the civilization of the city of Rome. Remember also that this was the era of the Spanish king Philip II, and that when he needed the services of two cardinals for one of his schemes, he gave each of them 200,000 livres in ecclesiastical benefices. Rome, without a formidable army of its own, was the capital of the world. Paris in 1559 was the home of pleasant-enough barbarians.

*Exact Translation of an Old
Narrative, Written around 1566*

Jean-Pierre Carafa, though born to one of the noblest families in the kingdom of Naples, had the rough and violent manners more suited to a herdsman.⁴ He wore the “long coat” (that is, the cassock), and he went to Rome as a young man, where he was aided by the favor of his cousin Olivier Carafa, cardinal and archbishop of Naples. Pope Alexander VI, that great man who was all-knowing and all-powerful, made him his *cameriere* (which is more or less what we in our

world would call a knight of the chamber). Julius II named him archbishop of Chieti; Pope Paul III made him a cardinal, and finally, on the twenty-third of May 1555, after much intrigue and many terrible disputes among the cardinals sequestered in the conclave, he was made pope and took the name Paul IV; at that time, he was seventy-eight years old. Even those who had called him to the throne of Saint Peter trembled at the thought of the harshness and the ferocious, inexorable piety of the master they had created for themselves.

The news of this unexpected election caused revolutions in Naples and Palermo. Within a few days, a great number of the illustrious Carafa family arrived in Rome. All were given places; but, as was most natural, the pope particularly distinguished his three nephews, sons of his brother the Count of Montorio.

Don Juan, the eldest and already married, was made Duke of Palliano. This duchy, snatched away from Marc-Antoine Colonna, to whom it actually belonged,⁵ included a great number of villages and small towns. Don Carlos, the second nephew of His Holiness, was a chevalier of Malta and had been to war; he was made cardinal, legate of Bologna, and first minister.⁶ He was a man of resolution; faithful to his family's traditions, he dared to detest the most powerful king in the world (Philip II, king of Spain and the Indies) and to give him more than one proof of his hatred. As for the third nephew of the new pope, Don Antonio Carafa, because he was married, the pope named him Marquis of Montebello. Finally, the pope tried to give as wife to François, Dauphin of France and the son of King Henri II, a daughter that his brother had had from a second marriage; Pope Paul IV claimed that she would have for her dowry the kingdom of Naples, which would have meant taking it away from Philip II, king of Spain. The Carafa family hated that powerful king, who,

aided by the family's own missteps, would succeed in exterminating them, as you will see.

Once he ascended to the throne of Saint Peter, the most powerful in the world, which at this time eclipsed even that of the illustrious monarch of Spain, Paul IV, just as has been seen with most of his successors, proceeded to serve as an example of all the virtues. He was a great pope and a great saint; he applied himself to reforming the abuses within the church and by this means avoiding having to call a Council General, for which all parties at the papal court were clamoring, and which a wise politician would never have granted.

According to the norms of the time, norms that are wholly forgotten in our time, a sovereign was allowed to put his trust only in men whose interests coincided with his own, and thus the Papal States were governed despotically by the pope's three nephews. The cardinal was first minister and was responsible for carrying out his uncle's orders; the Duke of Palliano was made general of the troops of the holy church; and the Marquis of Montebello, captain of the palace guards, allowed entrance only to those persons he wished. Soon these young men were committing every sort of gross excess; they began by appropriating the property of families that had been opposed to their government. People did not know where to turn to seek justice. Not only did they have to fear for their goods but also, a horrible thing to say in the country of the chaste Lucrece, the very honor of their wives and their daughters was not secure. The Duke of Palliano and his brothers carried off the most beautiful women, who had done nothing but been unlucky enough to have pleased them. People watched, stupefied, as they showed no respect for rank or blood and, even worse, they were not impeded by the sacred enclosures around holy cloisters. The people were reduced to despair, with no one to hear their com-

plaints, so great was the terror the three brothers inspired in everyone who approached the pope; they showed insolence even to foreign ambassadors.

The duke had married, before his uncle's rise to greatness, Violante de Cardone, from a family of Spanish origin and of the highest level of nobility in Naples.

The family could boast of belonging to the *Seggio di nido*.⁷

Violante, celebrated for her rare beauty and for those graces that she knew how to deploy when she wanted to please, was even more celebrated for her titanic pride. But to be fair, it would have been difficult to find a more elevated, noble spirit, which she showed when, with her confessor and at the point of her own death, she admitted to nothing. She knew by heart, and could recite with an infinite grace, the superb *Orlando* by Messer Ariosto, the greater part of Petrarch's sonnets, and the stories from the *Pecorone*, etc.⁸ But she was even more magnetic when she deigned to entertain the company with the remarkable ideas whose origin was her own mind.

She had a son who was called the Duke of Cavi. Her brother D. Ferrand, Count d'Aliffé, came to Rome, attracted there by the great good fortune of his brothers-in-law.

The Duke of Palliano maintained a splendid court; the young men from the finest families in Naples schemed to have the honor of being part of it. Among those who were most dear to him, Rome had distinguished for its own admiration Marcel Capece (also from the *Seggio di nido*), a young cavalier celebrated in Naples for his wit as well as for the gift of divine beauty that heaven had given him.

The duchess had for her favorite Diane Brancaccio, then about thirty years old and a close relative of the Marquise of Montebello, her sister-in-law. People in Rome said that when it came to her

favorite, the duchess had no pride; she confided all her secrets in her. But all her secrets had to do with political matters only; the duchess ignited passions, but she shared them with no one.

Following the counsel of Cardinal Carafa, the pope made war on the king of Spain, and the king of France sent the pope help in the form of an army commanded by the Duke of Guise.

But we must restrict ourselves to events within the court of the Duke of Palliano.

For some time, Capece had seemed to have gone mad; people saw him committing some of the oddest acts; the fact is that the poor young man had fallen passionately in love with the duchess, his “mistress,” but he dared not let her know. Nevertheless, he did not despair absolutely of achieving his goal, for he observed the duchess deeply irritated by a husband who neglected her. The Duke of Palliano was all powerful in Rome, and the duchess knew without a doubt that practically every day, the Roman women most celebrated for their beauty would come to see her husband in his own palazzo, and this was an affront to which she could not accustom herself.⁹

Among the chaplains of the holy Pope Paul IV was a respectable clergyman with whom he would recite his breviary. This individual, at the risk of losing everything, and perhaps pushed into it by the Spanish ambassador, dared one day to tell the pope all the villainous deeds his nephews were involved in. The holy pontiff was sick with heartache at hearing this; he wanted not to believe it; but overwhelming proofs were reaching him from all sides. It was on the first day of the year 1559 that an event transpired to convince the pope of all his suspicions, and perhaps it decided His Holiness. This was the feast day of the Circumcision of Our Lord, a circumstance that significantly aggravated the sin in the eyes of so pious a sovereign: André

Lanfranchi, secretary to the Duke of Palliano, gave a magnificent supper for Cardinal Carafa, and, desirous of ensuring that the excursions of sensuality would outstrip those of gourmandise, he brought to the supper La Martuccia, one of the most beautiful, most famous, and wealthiest courtesans in the noble city of Rome. As fate would have it, Capecce, the duke's favorite and the man secretly in love with the duchess, and the man who was considered the handsomest man in the world's capital, had been involved with La Martuccia for some time. This evening, he sought for her everywhere he thought she might be. Not finding her, and learning that there was a supper at the Lanfranchi place, he suspected what was afoot, and at midnight he presented himself at Lanfranchi's, accompanied by a great number of armed men.

The door was opened to him, and he was encouraged to enter and sit down, to make himself part of the festivities; but after a few constrained exchanges, he made a sign to La Martuccia to get up and come away with him. While she hesitated, confused and half foreseeing what was going to happen, Capecce got up from his seat and, approaching the young lady, took her by the hand and attempted to pull her away with him. The cardinal, in whose honor she had come, vigorously protested her departure; Capecce persisted, forcing her out of the room with him.

The cardinal and first minister, who this evening had worn clothing quite different from the robes that would have announced his great dignity, took his sword in his hand and declared his opposition to the young woman's leaving with all the vigor and bravery that all Rome knew quite well. Marcel, drunk with rage, called his men in; but they were Neapolitans, and when they recognized first the duke's secretary and then the cardinal despite the extraordinary outfit he was

wearing, they sheathed their swords, not wanting to fight, and attempted to smooth over the quarrel.

During all this tumult, La Martuccia, surrounded by men, and her left hand still in the grip of Marcel Capece, managed to slip away and escape. When Marcel realized she was gone, he raced off after her, and everyone followed him.

But the obscurity of night lends authority to the strangest of tales, and during the early hours of January 2, the capital was flooded with stories of perilous combat taking place, it was said, between the nephew cardinal and Marcel Capece. The Duke of Palliano, general in chief of the army of the church, thought the whole business was far more serious than it really was, and since he was not on very good terms with his brother the minister, that same night he had Lanfranchi arrested, and, early in the morning, Marcel himself was put in prison. Then it became clear that no one had been killed, and that the imprisonments only worsened the scandal, which fell entirely upon the cardinal. The prisoners were hurriedly released, and the immense power of the three brothers was deployed to snuff out gossip about the affair. At first, they expected they would be successful; but on the third day, the whole story came to the notice of the pope. He called for the two nephews and spoke to them using the kind of language one would expect from so pious and so profoundly offended a prince.

The fifth day of January saw a great number of cardinals united for the Congregation of the Holy Office, and the holy pope was the first to speak of this horrible affair, asking the cardinals to tell him whatever they had not dared to tell him before:

“You have been silent! And the scandal attaches to the sublime dignity of the robes you are wearing! Cardinal Carafa dared to ap-

pear in public wearing secular clothing and brandishing a naked sword. And why? In order to hold on to an infamous courtesan!”

One can imagine the deathly silence among all the assembled courtiers during this speech against the first minister. Here was an old man of eighty inveighing against his dearest nephew, the man who up to now carried out all his wishes. In his indignation, the pope spoke of removing his nephew from the ranks of the cardinals.

The rage of the pope was fanned by the ambassador of the grand duchy of Tuscany, who now came forward to complain of a recent insolence on the part of the cardinal first minister. The latter, so powerful until now, presented himself at the office of His Holiness as part of his daily duties. The pope made him wait for four full hours in the antechamber, exposed to everyone’s view, then sent him away without granting him an audience. One can imagine what this did to the enormous pride of the minister. The cardinal was irritated, but not defeated; he assumed that an old man overcome by his years, his whole life dominated by his love for his family, and little used to an efficient handling of temporal affairs would eventually be obliged to turn to him. But the virtue of the holy pope carried the day; he convoked the cardinals and, having looked out at them for a long while without speaking, ultimately broke into tears and wasted no time in making honorable amends:

“The weakness of age,” he told them, “and all the attention I have paid to religious matters—through which, as you know, I am trying to eliminate abuses—these have led me to confide my temporal authority in my three nephews; they have abused my trust, and I now banish them forever.”

Then an edict was read out, by which the nephews were despoiled of all their dignities and confined to miserable villages. The cardinal

first minister was exiled to Civita Lavinia, the Duke of Palliano to Soriano, and the marquis to Montebello; by this edict, the duke was stripped of all his regular appointments, which had raised for him some 72,000 piastres (the equivalent of more than a million in 1838).

There could be no question of failing to obey these severe commands: the Carafa brothers had made the whole population of Rome their enemies, and they could not escape their watchful gaze, being so universally detested.

The Duke of Palliano, accompanied by the Count d'Aliffé, his brother-in-law, and Léonard del Cardine, went and established himself in the little village of Soriano, while the duchess and her mother-in-law set themselves up in Gallese, a wretched hamlet a short two leagues from Soriano.

The two locales are charming, but this was an exile, and they had been exiled from Rome, where they had till now reigned with insolence.

Marcel Capece had followed his "mistress," along with other courtiers, into the poor village of her exile. Instead of being showered with homages from all of Rome, this woman, so powerful just a few days before, this woman who loved her social rank with all the rage of pride, now saw herself surrounded only by gaping peasants, whose very astonishment was a continual reminder of her fall. She had no consolations; the uncle was so old that he would probably be surprised by death before he would think of his nephews again, and what made it all even worse was that the three brothers detested each other. It was said that the duke and the marquis, who did not share the fiery passions of the cardinal, were so taken aback by his excesses that they had gone so far as to report them to the pope, their uncle.

In the midst of the horror of this whole episode of disgrace, a thing

happened that, unluckily for the duchess as well as for Capece himself, revealed that it had not been a real passion that had dragged him out in search of La Martuccia in Rome that night.

One day, when the duchess had called for him to give him some orders, he found himself alone with her, something that happened, at most, once or twice in a year. When he saw that there was no one in the room where the duchess had received him, Capece stood still and silent. He moved over to the door to see if there was anyone who could overhear in the next room, and then he dared to speak to her thus:

“Madame, please do not be disturbed, and please do not be angry, at the things I am about to be so bold as to say to you. I have long loved you more than life itself. If, with too much impudence, I have dared to look upon your divine charms with the eyes of a lover, you must blame not me but rather the supernatural force that impels me and agitates me. I implore you, I love you; I do not ask for any kind of relief for the flame that is eating me up, but I ask only that in your generosity you look with pity upon your servant, filled as he is with deference and humility.”

The duchess appeared surprised and irritated:

“Marcel,” she said to him, “what have you seen in me that gives you the boldness to ask for my love? Is there something in my life, something in my conversation, that is so outside the bounds of decency, something that has seemed to authorize you to have the audacity to think that I could give myself to you or to any other man apart from my husband and lord? I forgive what you have said to me, because I believe you are in a kind of frenzy; but beware never again to make such a mistake, or I swear that I will have you punished not only for that second but also for this first insolence.”

The duchess swept out of the room in a fury, and in fact Capece had broken the laws of prudence: he should have let it be seen and not said it. He stood there flustered, greatly fearing that the duchess would tell her husband.

But what followed was very different from what he had feared. In the solitude of that village, the proud Duchess of Palliano could not keep herself from confiding what he had had the audacity to say to her to her favorite lady-in-waiting, Diane Brancaccio. She was a woman of thirty, torn by violent passions. She had red hair (a detail to which the historian frequently returns, as if this one circumstance explained all Diane Brancaccio's follies). She was furiously in love with Domitien Fornari, a gentleman attached to the Marquis of Montebello. She wanted him for her husband; but would the marquis and his wife, with whom she had blood ties, ever consent to seeing her wedded to a man currently in their service? This was an insurmountable obstacle, or at least apparently so.

There was only one possibility: she would have to obtain some help from the Duke of Palliano, the marquis's elder brother, and Diane was not without hope that this could happen. The duke treated her more like a relative than like a domestic. He was a man with a certain degree of simplicity of heart, with some real goodness, and he cared far less than his brothers did about questions of labeling and rank. Although the duke profited, as any young man would, from the advantages his high position gave him, and was hardly faithful to his wife, he loved her tenderly and, if appearances are any guide, could not refuse her any grace if she only asked him persistently enough.

The avowal that Capece had dared to make to the duchess was an unexpected boon to the somber Diane. Her mistress up to that point had always been hopelessly sensible; if now she were to experi-

ence some twinge of passion, if now she were to commit some kind of slip, she would need Diane at her side every minute, and the latter could indulge unbridled hopes of a woman whose secrets she knew.

Thus, far from reminding the duchess of the duty she owed to herself, and far from warning her of the frightening dangers to which she would expose herself among a court as keen-eyed as this one, Diane instead, impelled by her own fiery passion, spoke to her mistress about Marcel Capece the way she spoke to herself about Domitien Fornari. During their long conversations in the solitude of exile, she found means every day of reminding the duchess of the charms and the beauty of that poor Marcel, who seemed so sorrowful; he belonged, just like the duchess, to one of the best families in Naples, his manners were as noble as his blood, and all he lacked right now was the kind of wealth (and the caprices of Fortune could provide him with that at any moment) that would make him the equal of the woman he dared to love.

Diane perceived with delight that the first effect of talking like this was that the duchess redoubled her trust in her.

Nor did she fail to keep Marcel Capece informed of what was happening. During the sweltering summer days, the duchess often went for walks in the woods around Gallese. At sunset, she would go await the ocean breezes on the charming hills that rise up in the midst of the woods, from the summits of which the sea can be glimpsed two leagues distant.

Without any severe violation of the laws of etiquette, Marcel could find himself within these woods, too: they say that he hid himself in there taking care to remain hidden from the duchess unless and until she had been well prepared by Diane Brancaccio. The latter would give Marcel a signal.

Diane, seeing her mistress on the point of listening to the fatal passion she had caused to be born in her heart, gave in wholly to the violent love that Domitien Fornari had inspired in her. Now she could be assured of being able to marry him. But Domitien was a prudent young man with a cold, reserved character; the fiery transports of his mistress, far from inspiring him, repelled him. Diane Brancaccio was a close relative of the Carafa family; he was sure to be stabbed to death at the slightest report that reached the ears of the terrible Cardinal Carafa, who, though younger than the duke, was in fact the veritable head of the family.

The duchess had surrendered to Capece's passion for some time when, one fine day, Domitien Fornari was nowhere to be found in the village where the Marquis of Montebello was exiled. He had disappeared: later, it came out that he had taken ship at the port of Nettuno; no doubt he had changed his name, and after that, no one heard any news of him.

Who could paint the despair of Diane? After having had the goodness to listen to her endless laments about fate, one day the duchess gave her to understand that she considered the topic to have been exhausted. Diane saw herself spurned by her lover: her heart was being torn apart by the cruelest forces; and when the duchess showed herself to be bored by her laments, she drew a strange conclusion. She persuaded herself that it was the duchess who had arranged for Domitien Fornari to leave her forever and, moreover, that it had been she who had furnished him with the means for traveling. This mad idea was founded solely on a few reproaches that the duchess had once addressed to her. Suspicion quickly evolved into vengeance. She requested an audience with the duke and told him everything that had passed between his wife and Marcel. The duke refused to believe it.

"Consider," he said to her, "that for fifteen years I have not had a

thing to reproach the duchess with; she has resisted all the seductions of the court and all the attractions that her brilliant position opened up to her in Rome; the most attractive princes, including the Duke of Guise himself, found they were wasting their time with her, and you expect me to believe she gave in to a mere cavalier?"

Bad luck would have it that the duke was miserably bored with Soriano, the village to which he had been sent, and given that it was a mere two leagues distant from the place where his wife lived, Diane was able to obtain a number of audiences without the duchess's becoming aware. Diane had a striking intelligence, and passion had rendered her eloquent. She provided the duke with a host of details; vengeance had become her sole pleasure in life. She told the duke repeatedly that almost every night, Capece came into the duchess's bedchamber about eleven o'clock and did not leave until two or three in the morning. All this made so little impression on the duke that he did not even take the trouble to journey the two leagues to Gallese at midnight and appear unannounced in his wife's bedchamber.

But one evening, when he happened to be at Gallese, the sun had just set, though it was still light, and Diane rushed, completely disheveled, into the salon where the duke was. All the others withdrew, and she told him that Marcel Capece had just entered the duchess's bedchamber. The duke, no doubt in a foul mood at the moment, took his dagger and rushed to his wife's room, which he entered by a secret door. He found Marcel Capece there. In fact, the two lovers changed color on seeing him enter; but other than that, there was nothing untoward in the positions the two were found in. The duchess was in her bed, making a note of a small expense she had recently incurred; a waiting woman was also in the room; Marcel was standing about three paces away from the bed.

The enraged duke gripped Marcel by the throat and dragged him

into the next room, where he ordered him to throw the daggers he was carrying onto the ground. After this, the duke called for his guards, and they conducted Marcel immediately to the prison at Soriano.

The duchess was left to stay in her palazzo, but she was closely guarded.

The duke was really not a cruel man; it appeared that he wanted to cover up the ignominy of the thing so as not to have to take the extreme measures that honor would demand of him. He wanted to have it believed that Marcel was held in prison for some completely different reason, and, using as a pretext some enormous toads that Marcel had recently purchased, he had it spread about that the young man had intended to poison him. But the true crime was only too well known, and the cardinal his brother asked him when he was going to wash the family honor clean in the blood of the guilty ones.

The duke enlisted the Count d'Aliffe, his wife's brother, and Antoine Torando, a friend of the house. The three of them, forming a kind of tribunal, sat in judgment on Marcel Capecece, accused of adultery with the duchess.

The instability of all things human would have it that Pope Pius IV, who succeeded Paul IV, was of the Spanish faction. There was nothing he would refuse to King Philip II, who requested the deaths of the cardinal and of the Duke of Palliano. The two brothers were indicted before Rome's tribunal, and the minutes of the trial that ensued tell us all the circumstances relating to the death of Marcel Capecece.

One of the numerous witnesses deposed put it this way:

"We were at Soriano; the duke, my master, had a long conversation with the Count d'Aliffe. . . . That night, very late, we went down

to a storeroom on the ground floor, where the duke had had the ropes prepared for the questioning of the guilty man. There, we found the duke, the Count d'Aliffe, Signor Antoine Torando, and me.

"The first witness called was Captain Camille Grifone, an intimate friend and confidant of Capece. The duke spoke to him thus:

"Tell the truth, my friend. What do you know about what Marcel was doing in the duchess's bedchamber?"

"I don't know anything; Marcel and I quarreled about three weeks ago."

"When he stubbornly refused to say anything more, my lord the duke called for some of his guards to come in. Grifone was tied up with the ropes by the *podesta* of Soriano. The guards pulled on the ropes, and by this means they raised Grifone about four fingers' height off the ground. After the captain had hung there for a good quarter of an hour, he said:

"Let me down; I'll tell you what I know."

"When they lowered him, the guards retired and we remained alone with him.

"It is true that I accompanied Marcel up to the bedchamber of the duchess many times, but I don't know anything more, because I waited outside in a neighboring courtyard until one in the morning."

"Then they called the guards back in, and on the orders of the duke, they raised him up by the ropes again so that his feet did not touch the ground. Soon the captain cried out:

"Let me down, and I'll tell the truth. It is true," he continued, 'that I knew for several months that Marcel was making love with the duchess, and I wanted to tell either Your Excellency or D. Léonard. The duchess sent every morning to ask about Marcel; she gave him little gifts, *confitures* prepared with great care and very expensive,

among other things; and I have seen Marcel wearing thin gold chains of marvelous workmanship, which he could have had only from the duchess.'

"After that deposition, the captain was taken back to prison. They brought in the duchess's porter, who said that he knew nothing about it; they tied him up in the ropes, and he was raised up in the air. After half an hour, he said:

"Let me down; I'll tell you what I know.'

"Once back on the ground, he pretended not to know anything; he was raised up again. After half an hour they lowered him; he explained that he had not been in service to this particular duchess for very long. Because it was possible that the man knew nothing, they took him back to prison. All these things took a long time, because the guards had to be sent out every time. They wanted the guards to think that it was a matter of an attempted poisoning with the venom extracted from some toads.

"The night was already well advanced when the duke had Marcel Capece brought in. When the guards had left and the door had been locked:

"What have you been doing,' he asked him, 'in the duchess's bed-chamber that you would stay there until one, two, and sometimes even four o'clock in the morning?'

"Marcel denied everything; they called the guards, and he was suspended in the ropes; the rope dislocated his arms; unable to endure the pain, he asked to be lowered; he was placed on a chair; but once he was there, his speech was muddled, and he clearly did not know what he was saying. The guards were called back, and he was suspended anew; after a long time, he asked to be lowered.

"It is true,' he said, 'that I have been in the duchess's apartment

at those unwarranted hours; but I was courting Signora Diane Brancaccio, one of Her Excellency's ladies, and I was engaged to marry her; she allowed me everything, except those things that would stain her honor.'

"Marcel was returned to prison, where they confronted him with the captain and with Diane, who denied everything.

"Then they brought Marcel back into the storeroom; when we were near to the door, before entering:

"My Lord Duke,' Marcel said, 'Your Excellency will recall that you promised to save my life if I told the whole truth. It is not necessary to put me in the ropes again; I will tell you everything.'

"Then he approached the duke and, with a trembling, barely articulated voice, he admitted that he had obtained the duchess's favors. At these words, the duke leaped upon Marcel and bit into his cheek; then he drew his dagger, and I could see that he was about to stab the guilty man. At that moment, I said that it would be best if Marcel would write down in his own hand what he had just admitted, and that this document would serve as justification for His Excellency. We went into the storeroom, where they found writing materials; but the ropes had so injured Marcel's arms and hands that he could write only these few words: 'Yes, I have betrayed my Lord; yes, I have dishonored him!'

"The duke read as Marcel was writing. The minute he was finished, he leaped upon him and stabbed him three times, taking his life. Diane Brancaccio was there, three steps away, more dead than alive and no doubt repenting a thousand times over what she had done.

"'Woman, unworthy of your birth in a noble family!' cried the duke; 'sole cause of my dishonor, you have schemed in the service of

your own immoral pleasures, and I must now give you the recompense all your treasons have earned.'

"And saying this, he pulled her toward him by the hair and slashed her throat with his knife. The miserable woman's blood poured out copiously, and at last she fell down dead.

"The duke had the two corpses thrown into a cesspit that was near the prison."

The young cardinal Alphonse Carafa, son of the Marquis of Montebello, was the only one of the family who remained with Paul IV; he thought it best to tell the pope of these events. The pope responded in these words:

"And the duchess? What has been done with her?"

In Rome, it was generally believed that these words must lead to the death of that unfortunate woman. But the duke was unable to make up his mind for this great sacrifice, whether because she was with child or because of the great tenderness he had once felt for her.

Three months after the great virtuous act that the holy pope Paul IV had accomplished in cutting his family off from him, he fell ill, and after three months' sickness, he died, on August 18, 1559.

The cardinal wrote letter after letter to the Duke of Palliano, repeating incessantly that their honor demanded the death of the duchess. Seeing that their uncle was dead, and not knowing what the thoughts of the newly elected pope would be on the matter, he wanted to have everything finished during the brief interval.

The duke, a simple man, decent and far less scrupulous than the cardinal regarding points of honor, could not bring himself to decide what to do about the terrible extremes that were now demanded of him. He reminded himself that he had been often unfaithful to the duchess, and without giving himself the slightest trouble to keep

those infidelities secret, and that such infidelities may have moved a woman with as elevated a spirit as hers to seek revenge. Upon entering the conclave, and after having attended Mass and received Holy Communion, the cardinal wrote him again, saying he felt tortured by these continual postponements and that if the duke did not resolve to do what the honor of their house required, he declared that he would have nothing more to do with him and would never seek to be useful to him, neither during the conclave nor with the new pope. A reason having nothing to do with points of honor finally determined the duke. While the duchess was guarded, she nonetheless found a way, people said, to get word to Marc-Antoine Colonna—the duke’s mortal enemy, because Palliano had been Colonna’s before it was wrested away from him and given to the duke—she said that if Marc-Antoine could find a way to save her life and make her escape, she, on her part, would put him in possession of the fortress of Palliano, the commander of which was loyal to her.

On the twenty-eighth of August 1559, the duke sent two companies of soldiers to Gallese. On the thirtieth, D. Léonard del Cardine, the duke’s relative, and D. Ferrant, the Count d’Aliffe, brother to the duchess, arrived at Gallese and entered into the duchess’s apartments in order to kill her. They told her she was to die, an announcement she heard without the slightest reaction. She wanted first to confess and to attend Holy Mass. Then, as these two lords approached, she observed that they did not seem to be quite in accord with each other. She asked if they had a written order from the duke, her husband, commanding her death.

“Yes, Madame,” replied D. Léonard.

The duchess asked to see it; D. Ferrant showed it to her.

(I find the depositions of the monks who assisted in this terrible

action in the report of the Duke of Palliano's trial. These depositions are greatly superior to those of other witnesses, a fact that proves, at least as I see it, that the monks were free from fear when speaking before the court of justice, whereas all the other witnesses were more or less complicit with their master.)

Brother Antoine de Pavie, a Capuchin, testified as follows:

"After that Mass, at which she devoutly received Holy Communion, and while we sought to comfort her, the Count d'Aliffè, brother to my lady the duchess, entered the room with a rope and a hazel stick that was as thick as a thumb and half an ell in length. He covered the duchess's eyes with a kerchief, and she in a very calm manner let it settle over her eyes so as not to see. The count put the rope around her neck; but when it did not settle smoothly, he removed it and stepped back a few paces; the duchess, hearing him walk away, removed the kerchief from her eyes and said:

"Well, what is it? What are you doing?"

"The count replied:

"The rope was giving me trouble; I'll get another one, so as not to make you suffer."

"With those words, he left; shortly, he returned with another rope, and he arranged the kerchief over her eyes again; he put the rope around her neck, and, putting the hazel stick into the knot, he turned it so as to strangle her. The duchess's tone of voice, during the entire episode, never varied from that of ordinary conversation."

Brother Antoine de Salazar, another Capuchin, ended his testimony with these words:

"I wanted to leave the room out of concern for my conscience, so as not to see her die; but the duchess said to me:

"Do not go away, for the love of God."

(And here the monk recounted the circumstances of her death exactly as we have reported it.) He added:

“She died like a true Christian, often repeating: ‘I believe; I believe.’”

The two monks, who had evidently obtained the necessary authorization from their superior, repeated in their testimony that the duchess always protested that she was entirely innocent in her conversations with them as well as in her confessions, and particularly in the confession that preceded the Mass when she received Holy Communion. If she were guilty, this act of pride would hurl her into hell.

In a confrontation between Brother Antoine de Pavie, Capuchin, and D. Léonard del Cardine, the monk said:

“My companion told the count that it would be best to wait until the duchess gave birth; he added, she is six months pregnant, and we must not lose the soul of the poor little creature she is carrying within her; we must baptize the child.

“To this Count d’Aliffe replied:

“‘You know that I must return to Rome, and I do not want to appear there with some kind of mask on my face’ (meaning with this offense unavenged).”

As soon as the duchess was dead, the two monks pleaded for her to be opened up immediately so that they could baptize the child; but the count and D. Léonard would not listen to their pleas.

The next day, the duchess was buried in the local church with some degree of pomp (I have read the records).¹⁰ This event, the news of which spread quickly, did not make much of an impression; it had been long expected; the death had been rumored already several times, both in Gallese and in Rome; and in any case, there was nothing unusual about an assassination occurring outside Rome and

during the time when the papal throne was vacant. The conclave following the death of Paul IV was a stormy one, lasting no less than four months.

On the twenty-sixth of December 1559, the poor cardinal Carlo Carafa was obliged to concur in the election of a cardinal supported by Spain, who therefore could not refuse any of the harsh demands that Philip II might make concerning Cardinal Carafa. The new pope took the name of Pius IV.

If the cardinal had not been in exile when Paul IV died, he would have been in charge of the election, or at least would have been in a position to prevent the election of an enemy.

Soon after, both the cardinal and the duke were arrested; Philip II had evidently ordered their executions. They had to respond to fourteen charges. Interrogations were carried out with anyone who could shed any light on the fourteen points. The report on the trial, very carefully composed, makes up two folio volumes, which I have read with great interest, given that one finds in them the kind of details about ways of life that are deemed unworthy of the majesty of history as usually written. I found some vivid details therein concerning an assassination attempt on Cardinal Carafa, then the all-powerful first minister, conducted by the Spanish party.

In any case, he and his brother were condemned to death for crimes that would not have been capital ones for anyone else, such as, for instance, putting a wife's lover to death as well as the unfaithful wife herself. A few years after this, Prince Orsini married the sister of the Grand Duke of Tuscany; he believed her to have been unfaithful, and he had her poisoned right in Tuscany, with the consent of the grand duke her brother, and no one considered this a crime. Many princesses of the house of the Medici met their ends in this way.

When the trial of the two Carafa was over, a lengthy summary of

it was made, and on several occasions this summary was examined by the congregations of cardinals. It is only too apparent that once it was agreed that the murderer of an adulterous wife was to be executed—a kind of vengeance that was never considered a crime—then the cardinal was guilty of having urged his brother to do it, just as the duke was guilty for actually having done it.

On the third of March 1561, Pope Pius IV convened a consistory that lasted eight hours, at the end of which he passed sentence on the Carafa in these terms: *Prout in schedulâ* (meaning, “Let it be done as stated”).

During the night of the following day, the fiscal sent an armed escort¹¹ to the Castel Sant’Angelo to carry out the sentence of death for the two brothers, Charles, Cardinal Carafa, and Jean, Duke of Palliano. The duke was first. He was transferred from the Castel Sant’Angelo to the prisons of Tordinone, where everything had been prepared; there, the duke, the Count d’Aliffe, and D. Léonard del Cardine were all beheaded.

The duke bore this terrible moment in the manner not only befitting a chevalier of high birth but also befitting a Christian ready to endure anything for the love of God. He addressed some fine words of exhortation to his two companions to ready them for their death; then he wrote to his son.¹²

The armed escort returned to the Castel Sant’Angelo, where he announced the sentence of death for Cardinal Carafa, giving him only one hour to prepare himself. The cardinal showed a grandeur of soul superior to that of his brother, though he spoke fewer words; speech is an external power that we seek out, not something that comes from within us. He was heard to murmur only these words when the terrible news was told him:

“I am to die! O Pope Pius! O King Philip!”

He made his confession; he recited the seven penitential Psalms, then sat down on a chair and said to the executioner:

“Do it.”

The executioner strangled him with a silken rope, which tore; he needed to start over twice. The cardinal looked at the executioner without saying a word.

Added Note: A few years later, the holy pope Pius V had the trial reopened, and he voided the sentences; the cardinal and his brother were reinstated with all their honors, and the procurator general, who had contributed the most to their deaths, was hanged. Pius V ordered the suppression of the trial report; all the copies that existed in libraries were burned; it was forbidden to retain them under pain of excommunication; but the pope did not think to check his own library, and that is the copy from which all the ones available today stem.

F. DE LAGENEVAIS¹³

THE ABBESS OF CASTRO



I

Melodrama has so often depicted brigands from sixteenth-century Italy, and so many writers have described them without actually knowing them, that the picture we have of them today is entirely false. It can be said, in general, that the people we call brigands were in fact the opposition to the wretched governments that, in Italy, succeeded the republics of the Middle Ages. The new tyrant was usually the richest citizen of the defunct republic, and in order to seduce the lower classes, he had beautiful churches built and beautiful paintings painted. Such were the Polentini of Ravenna, the Manfredi of Faenza, the Riario of Imola, the Cane of Verona, the Bentivoglio of Bologna, the Visconti of Milan, and, finally, the least bellicose and the most hypocritical of all of them, the Medici of Florence. Among the historians of these city-states, none dared tell the story of the numberless poisonings and assassinations that were carried out as a result of the fear that tormented these petty tyrants; for those grave historians were in their pay. Consider that each of these tyrants personally knew each of the republicans who detested them (Cosimo, for example, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, knew Strozzi), and that each of these tyrants died by assassination, and you will understand the profound hatreds, the eternal loathings that fueled the Italians of the sixteenth

century with energy and courage, and gave so much genius to their artists. You must understand that such profound passions eliminate the possibility of that ridiculous bias that has been called "honor," ever since the era of Madame de Sevigné, a bias that consists in sacrificing one's life in order to serve a master whose subject one was born to be, and to please ladies. In the sixteenth century, a man's actions and his real character could not be displayed in France, nor could he win admiration except on the field of battle or through dueling; and since women love bravery and above all audacity, they became the supreme judges of the merit of a man. From this state of affairs was born the "spirit of gallantry," which led the way to the successive annihilation of all the passions and even of love, and all for the benefit of that cruel tyrant to whom we all owe our obedience: vanity. Kings took care to nurture vanity, and with good reason; hence our empire of medals and ribbons.

In Italy, a man could distinguish himself in all the forms of merit, by swordplay as well as by making discoveries within ancient manuscripts: an excellent example is Petrarch, the idol of his era; and a sixteenth-century Italian woman could love a scholarly man just as intensely as she might love one celebrated for his military exploits. Here, we are in the realm of passions, not just in the routines of gallantry. And here is the great difference between Italy and France, and here is the reason why Italy gave birth to a Raphael, a Giorgione, a Titian, a Correggio, whereas sixteenth-century France produced so many brave captains, utterly unknown today despite the huge numbers of dead enemies they produced.

I ask the reader's pardon for speaking such rude truths. In any case, the hideous and "necessary" acts of vengeance carried out by the petty tyrants of the Italian Middle Ages had the result of winning the peo-

ple's hearts for the brigands. The brigands were hated when they stole horses, wheat—money, in a word, everything necessary for life; but in the depths of their hearts, the people were on their side; and the village girls preferred before all other boys the one who had been forced to *andar all macchia*—that is, to flee to the forest to take refuge with the brigands following some imprudent act or other.

In our own time, everyone of course fears encountering brigands; but when they are caught and punished, everyone feels for them. These are the clever, cynical readers who laugh at all the writings published under their masters' censorship system but never fail to read with eagerness any little poems that thrillingly narrate the lives of the most famous outlaws. What they find heroic in these stories is something that delights that artistic fiber that is always there in "the lower classes," and moreover they are so sick and tired of all the praise officialdom heaps upon certain people that this particular genre speaks directly to their hearts. It is important to know that the lower classes, in Italy, suffer from certain things that the traveler would never see, even if he were to live there ten years. For example, fifteen years ago, before the wisdom of the governments led to the suppression of the brigands,¹ it was not unusual to see certain exploits of theirs intended as punishments for the iniquities of the *governors* of small towns. These governors, absolute magistrates whose pay never rises above twenty *ecus*² a month, are naturally under the command of the richest family in the region, which by this simple expedient can successfully oppress its enemies. If the brigands did not always succeed in punishing these petty despotic governors, they at least made mock of them and braved them, and that is no small thing in the eyes of this sharp-witted populace. A satirical sonnet can console them for all their misfortunes, and they never forget an offense. And here we

have yet another capital distinction between the Italian and the French.

In the sixteenth century, if the governor of some town had condemned to death some poor man who was unlucky enough to have incurred the hatred of the leading family, often enough brigands would be seen attacking the prison and seeking to free the oppressed man. The powerful family, for its part, not trusting in the eight or ten soldiers that the government had stationed to guard the prison, would have levied at its own expense a troop of temporary soldiers. The latter, who were called *bravi*, would station themselves around the prison and take it as their charge to escort the poor condemned devil—whose death had been bought and paid for—to the gallows. If the family in power had a young man, he would be put at the head of these improvised soldiers. Such a state of civilization makes morality howl, I agree; in our time, we have the duel, along with ennui, and our judges are not for sale; and yet these sixteenth-century customs were marvelously adept at creating men who were worthy of the name.

Many historians, still lauded today by the predictable literature produced by the academies, have tried to falsify this state of things which, around 1550, formed such powerful characters. Ever since their own day, those historians' prudent and timid lies have been recompensed by all the honors that could be dispersed by the Medici of Florence, the Este of Ferrara, the viceroys of Naples, etc. One poor historian, a man named Giannone, tried to lift up a corner of the veil; but because he dared not speak more than a little fraction of the truth, and even that couched in doubtful and obscure phrases, he ended up being extremely tedious—though all that did not prevent him from dying in prison at the age of eighty-two, on March 7, 1758.³

The first thing to do if one wants to learn about the history of Italy

is thus by no means to read the approved histories and authors; the price for lying has never been so clearly understood, and lying has never been so well compensated.⁴

The first histories written in Italy after the great barbarism of the ninth century already make mention of brigands, speaking of them as if they existed from time immemorial. See the collection by Muratori.⁵ When, to the misfortune of public well-being, justice, and good government but to the good fortune of the arts, the republics of the Middle Ages were suppressed, the most energetic republicans, the ones who loved liberty even more than their fellow citizens, took refuge in the forests. Naturally, the people vexed by the Baglioni, by the Malatesti, by the Bentivoglio, by the Medici, etc., loved and respected the men who were their enemies. The cruelties perpetrated by the petty tyrants who succeeded the initial usurpers—for example, the cruelties of Cosimo, the first Grand Duke of Florence, who had republicans hunted down and assassinated as far afield as Venice and Paris—served only to recruit more to the side of these brigands. To speak only of times closer to that of our heroine, around the year 1550, in the neighborhood of Albano, Alphonse Piccolomini, Duke of Monte-Mariano, and Marco Sciarra successfully led armed bands that braved the soldiers of the pope, who were themselves very brave. The field of operations of these famous leaders, who are still admired by the people, extended from the Po and the marshlands around Ravenna to the forests covering Vesuvius. The forest of La Faggiola, famous because of their exploits, situated five leagues from Rome on the road to Naples, was the region of Sciarra, who, under the pontificate of Gregory XIII, mustered several thousand soldiers. The detailed history of this illustrious brigand would be incredible in the eyes of the current generation, in that they could never understand

the motives for his actions. He was not defeated until 1592. When he saw his situation was desperate, he negotiated with the Republic of Venice and went over to its service along with his most devoted (or most culpable, whichever term you like) soldiers. Bowing to the demand of the government in Rome, Venice, which had signed a treaty with Sciarra, had him assassinated and sent his brave soldiers to defend the island of Candia against the Turks. But Venetian shrewdness knew very well that a plague was raging at Candia, and in a few days the five hundred of Sciarra's soldiers who had come to serve Venice were reduced to sixty-seven.

This forest of La Faggiola, whose giant trees spread out over an ancient volcano, was the final theater of Marco Sciarra's exploits. Every traveler will tell you that it is the most magnificent area in that fine Roman countryside, with a somber aspect that seems designed for tragedy. It sits like a crown of dark green atop the summits of Monte Albano.

We owe this superb mountain to a certain volcanic eruption many centuries before the founding of Rome. During that era, preceding all the histories, it surged up from the midst of the vast plain that, in those days, extended from the Apennines to the sea. Monte Cavi, rising amid the dark shadows of La Faggiola, is the culmination point; it can be seen from all directions, from Terracina and Ostia and from Rome and Tivoli, and it is Monte Albano, covered now with palazzos, which, to the south, closes off that Roman horizon so beloved of travelers. The temple of Jupiter Feretrius⁶ at the summit, which has been replaced by a monastery of Capuchin monks,⁷ is a place where the Latin peoples used to come and sacrifice together, revalidating the links of a certain religious federation among them. Protected by the shade of magnificent chestnut trees, the traveler comes, after a few

hours' walk, to the enormous stones that are the ruins of the temple of Jupiter; but under those dark shades, so delicious in this climate, even today the traveler eyes the forest itself uneasily; he is afraid of brigands. Once arrived at the summit of Monte Cavi, travelers start cooking fires in the ruins of the temple. From this point, which dominates the whole Roman countryside, you can see the sea—apparently very close, but in fact three or four leagues distant; you can make out the smallest boats; and with even the weakest looking glass you can count the people leaving Naples on the steamboat. From all the other sides, the view extends over a magnificent plain that comes to an end on the east by the Apennines above Palestrina and to the north by Saint Peter and the other great edifices of Rome. Monte Cavi's elevation being moderate, the eye can pick out the smallest details of this sublime landscape, which has no need for the enhancements of historical association, but in fact every clump of trees, every fragmentary wall calls up memories of one of those great battles marked by patriotism and bravery that Titus Livy recounts.

And in our time, one can still follow, on the way to those enormous blocks, all that remains of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, serving now as a sort of garden wall for the Capuchin monks—we can still follow the “triumphal road” traveled by the first Roman kings. It is paved with stones cut very regularly; and long fragments of the road can be found in the midst of the forest of La Faggiola.

On the edges of the extinct crater, now filled with limp water, is the lovely Lake Albano, about five or six miles in circumference and deeply embedded in lava rock; here once stood the city of Alba, the mother of Rome, destroyed on political grounds by those first Roman kings. But its ruins still exist. Several centuries later, a quarter of a league from Alba on the side of the mountain facing the sea,

arose Albano, the modern town; but it is separated from the lake by a curtain of rocks hiding the lake from the town and the town from the lake. If one looks up at Albano from the plain, its white buildings detach themselves from the deep, dark green of that forest so dear to the brigands and so famous for that reason; it crowns the volcanic mountain on all sides.

Albano, which counts today some five or six thousand inhabitants, had fewer than three thousand in 1540 when the powerful Campireali family flourished, a family of the highest rank of nobility and one whose misfortunes we are about to recount.

I translate the story from two voluminous manuscripts, one Roman and the other Florentine.⁸ Though at my own grave peril, I will dare to reproduce their style, which is much like that of our old legends. The pointed, measured style of the present day, it seems to me, would fit poorly with the actions narrated and, above all, with the reflections of the authors. They both wrote around the year 1598. I ask the reader's indulgence both for them and for me.

II

"After having written so many tragic stories," says the author of the Florentine manuscript, "I shall conclude with the one that gives me the most pain to tell. I am going to speak of that famous abbess of the Convent of the Visitation at Castro, Elena de Campireali, whose trial and death caused so much talk in the higher levels of society in Rome and all Italy. Around 1555, the brigands ruled the countryside surrounding Rome, and the magistrates were all owned by the powerful families. In the year 1572, which was the year of the trial, Greg

ory XIII, Buoncompagni, ascended the throne of Saint Peter. This holy pope combined within himself all the apostolic virtues; but his civil government was open to reproach for a certain weakness: he could neither select honest judges nor crack down on the brigands; he was overwhelmed by crime, and he was unable to punish it. He felt that in passing a death sentence he was taking upon himself a terrible responsibility. The result of seeing things in that way was to people the roads leading in and out of the Eternal City with a seemingly infinite number of brigands. Anyone wishing to travel needed to make friends with the brigands. The forest of La Faggiola, on the road to Naples through Albano, had for a long time been the general headquarters of a government at enmity with that of His Holiness, and often Rome had been obliged to agree to a treaty, as if between two countries, with Marco Sciarra, one of the kings of the forest. The great power of the brigands lay in the fact that they were loved by the peasants their neighbors.

“This pretty town of Albano, situated so close to the general headquarters of the brigands, had seen the birth, in 1542, of Elena de Campireali. Her father was considered the wealthiest patrician of the region, and, as such, he had married Vittoria Carafa, who possessed great estates in the kingdom of Naples. I could cite a number of elderly people still alive today who knew Vittoria Carafa and her daughter very well. Vittoria was a model of prudence and intelligence; but despite all her genius, she could not prevent the ruin of her family. It is a strange thing, but the horrible misfortunes that are the sad subject of my tale cannot, in my view, be blamed on or attributed to any of the actors whom I shall be introducing to the reader: I see tragic people, but I cannot find any guilty ones. Young Elena’s extreme beauty and her very tender soul were her two greatest perils, and they are the

excuse of Giulio Branciforte, her lover, in the same way that the complete absence of intelligence on the part of Monsignor Cittadini, the bishop of Castro, can to a certain extent excuse him. He had owed his ecclesiastical advancement to the integrity of his conduct, and even more to his very dignified, noble demeanor and to his looks, the most perfectly handsome man one could hope to meet. I find it written that no one could look upon him without loving him.

“As I do not want to flatter anyone, I shall not hide the fact that a holy monk from the Monastery of Monte Cavi, who was often found in his cell levitating several feet above the floor, like Saint Paul, in an extraordinary state that could be possible only through divine grace,⁹ had predicted to Signor de Campireali that his family would become extinct with him and that he would have only two children, both of whom would perish through violence. It was because of this prediction that he could find no one in the region who would marry him, and so he went off to Naples, where he was lucky enough to come into great fortune and to find a woman capable, through her brilliant mind, of changing his unhappy fate, if such a thing had been possible. This Signor Campireali had the reputation of being a good man, and he gave much to charity, but he had no energy, which caused him gradually to retreat from his life in Rome and to end up spending practically the entire year in his palazzo at Albano. He devoted himself to cultivating his lands, situated in that rich plain between the town and the sea. Following his wife’s counsel, he arranged the finest education possible for his son Fabio, a young man very proud of his birth, and for his daughter Elena, who was of a miraculous beauty, as can be seen by her portrait, which is in the Farnese collection.¹⁰ When I began to write her story, I went to the Farnese Palace to reflect upon the mortal envelope that heaven had given this woman whose

fate was the subject of so much discussion in her day and still occupies a place in the memory of men. The shape of the face is an elongated oval, the forehead large, the hair a dark blond. Her expression is somewhat gay; she has large eyes with a profound expression; her chestnut eyebrows form a perfectly drawn arc. The lips are quite thin, and one might say that her mouth looks as if it had been drawn by the famous painter Correggio. Considered in relation to the other portraits around it in the Farnese Gallery, she has the air of a queen. It is very rare to see a gay air like hers combined with true majesty.

"After having spent eight whole years as a boarder in the Convent of the Visitation in the town of Castro, now destroyed, where the majority of Roman princes sent their daughters, Elena returned to her native region, but she did not leave the convent without first making an offering of a magnificent chalice for the great altar of the church. Soon after her return, her father brought from Rome the celebrated poet Cechino, then a very old man; he ornamented Elena's mind with the finest verses of the divine Virgil, along with those of his famous disciples Petrarch, Aristo, and Dante."

At this point, the translator is obliged to omit a long dissertation on the hierarchy of fame accorded to the various great poets in the sixteenth century. It would appear that Elena knew Latin. The verse that she was made to learn spoke always of love, a love that would seem completely ridiculous to us if we were to come across it in 1839; that is, it treated of passionate love, love that was nourished by great sacrifices, love that can subsist only in an atmosphere of mystery, and love that is always found accompanying the most horrible misfortunes.

And such was the love that Giulio Branciforte was to inspire in the barely seventeen-year-old Elena. He was one of her neighbors,

and very poor; he lived in a ramshackle house built on the mountain-side a quarter of a league from the town, amid the ruins of Alba, on the edge of that hundred-and-fifty-foot precipice, covered in greenery, that surrounds the lake. This house, bordering on the somber, deep shadows of the forest of La Faggiola, has since been demolished, during the time they were building the Monastery of Palazzola. The young man possessed nothing but his energy and his readiness, along with a genuine, easygoing approach to life that allowed him to endure his bad fortune. The best thing one can say about him is that his face was expressive without being handsome. But he was known to have fought bravely under the command of Prince Colonna and among his *bravi* in two or three very dangerous enterprises. Despite his poverty, despite his lack of beauty, he nonetheless possessed the heart that all the girls in Albano most wanted to conquer. Received wherever he went, Giulio Branciforte had had only passing love affairs until the day that Elena returned from the convent at Castro. "When, a little after this, the great poet Cechino came from Rome to the Campireali palazzo to teach belles lettres to this girl, Giulio, who knew him, wrote him some Latin verses on the happiness that his old age must be enjoying to find such beautiful eyes always looking into his, and to see the happiness that such a pure soul as hers must feel upon receiving his praise for her thoughts. The jealousy and the anger that all the other girls felt upon seeing Giulio's attentions wander upon the return of Elena soon rendered it impossible to hide his growing passion, and I must admit that this love between a young man of twenty-two and a girl of seventeen was conducted from the first in a manner that prudence could not approve. Three months had not passed when Signor de Campireali observed Giulio Branciforte passing far too often under the windows of his palazzo (which can still be seen halfway up the road that leads to the lake)."

Frank speaking and harshness, qualities that naturally accompany the liberty that republics tolerate, along with passions just as frank and not yet repressed by the ways of monarchy—these can be observed in the very first steps taken by Signor de Campireali. The very day he was startled to see these frequent appearances by young Branciforte, he addressed him in these terms:

“How dare you continue to pass back and forth by my house, casting your impertinent eyes upon the windows of my daughter, you who do not own even the clothes on your back? If I weren’t afraid that my generosity would be misinterpreted by my neighbors, I’d give you three golden sequins to go to Rome and buy yourself a jacket that actually fits you. At least then my view, and my daughter’s, would not be continually offended by the sight of your rags.”

Elena’s father no doubt exaggerated: the clothes of young Branciforte were not rags at all but were made of the simplest materials; but no matter how carefully and how often they were brushed and cleaned, it must be admitted that their long usage was clear to all. Giulio’s feelings were so hurt by the reproaches of Signor de Campireali that he ceased appearing near the house in the daytime.

As we have said, the two arches, the ruins of an ancient aqueduct serving as the principal walls of the house built by Branciforte’s father, stood only some five or six hundred paces from Albano. In order to descend from this elevated location to the modern town, Giulio was obliged to pass in front of the Campireali palazzo; Elena soon noticed the absence of the singular young man who, at least as her friends claimed, had abandoned all other friendships in order to consecrate himself entirely to the happiness he seemed to find in gazing upon her.

One summer night around midnight, Elena’s window was open, and the young girl was breathing in the sea air on the breeze that made

itself felt all up the hillside of Albano, even though the plain divides town from sea for three leagues. The night was dark, the silence profound; you could hear a leaf fall. Elena, leaning on her windowsill, was perhaps thinking of Giulio when she saw something like the silent wing of a night bird brush softly against her window. She drew back, frightened. The idea never entered her head that this object could be held up by some person below; the second floor of the palazzo, where this window was located, stood some fifty feet up. Suddenly, she was able to recognize that this strange object was a kind of bouquet that, in the deep silence, was passing and repassing in front of her window; her heart began to beat violently. The bouquet appeared to be fixed to the end of two or three of those *canne*, which are a species of thick reed, somewhat similar to bamboo, which grow in the Roman countryside, sending up stalks of twenty to thirty feet. The flimsiness of the *canne*, along with the strength of the breeze, made it so that Giulio had some difficulty in keeping his bouquet exactly in front of the window where he supposed Elena would be, and moreover the night was so dark that from the street no one could have seen anything up so high. Motionless behind her window, Elena was deeply troubled. To take the bouquet: would that not be a kind of avowal? She did not experience any of the feelings that an adventure like this would have aroused in the heart of a young society girl in our time, all prepared for life by a fine education. Because her father and her brother Fabio were in the house, her first thought was that the slightest noise would result in a *harquebus* shot being directed at Giulio; she felt pity, thinking of the danger the poor young man was putting himself in. Her second thought was that, despite how little she really knew him, he was the one being in the world she loved most after her family. Finally, after a few minutes of hesitation, she reached

out and took the bouquet, and as she touched the flowers in the profound darkness, she felt that a note had been attached to the stem of one of them; she rushed out to the great staircase to read the note in the light of the lamp that shone beneath the image of the Madonna. "Reckless!" she exclaimed to herself upon reading the first lines, which made her blush with happiness; "if they see me, I am lost, and my family will persecute this young man forever." She returned to her bedroom and lit her lamp. This moment was a delicious one for Giulio, who, embarrassed by his scheme and seeking to hide himself even further within the profound darkness, had leaned up against the enormous trunk of a great green oak, one of those which take on bizarre shapes and which can be seen yet today across from the Campireali palazzo.

In his letter, Giulio recounted with the most perfect simplicity the humiliating reprimand Elena's father had addressed to him. "I am poor, it is true," he continued,

and you would have trouble imagining the depth of my poverty. All I own is my house, which you may have seen under the ruins of the old aqueduct of Alba; around the house is my garden, which I tend myself, and what I grow there nourishes me. I also own a vineyard, which is rented for thirty ecus per year. To tell the truth, I do not know why I love you; I certainly cannot propose that you come and share my poverty. But what I do know is that if you do not love me, my life is worthless to me; it is useless to say that I would give it up a thousand times over for you. But before your return from the convent, this life was not an unfortunate one; on the contrary, it was full of the most wonderful dreams. So I can say that the sight of my happiness has made me miserable. Certainly, there is no person in the world other

than your father who could have talked to me like that; my dagger would have done prompt justice. With my courage and with my weapons, I regarded myself as the equal of anyone; I lacked nothing. But now all that has changed: I know what fear is. I am writing too much; perhaps you despise me. But if, on the contrary, you feel some pity for me despite the poor clothes I wear, you will find that every midnight when the bell sounds from the Capuchin monastery, I will be found at the top of the hill under the great oak, across from that window that I gaze upon always because I believe it is that of your room. If you do not despise me as your father does, throw me down one of the flowers from this bouquet, but take care that it doesn't get caught on one of the eaves or on one of the balconies of your palazzo.

This letter was read over many times; bit by bit, Elena's eyes were filled with tears; she gazed tenderly upon that magnificent bouquet whose flowers had been bound together with a strong silken thread. She tried to pull out a flower, but she could not get it out; and then she was seized with remorse. Young Roman girls believe that to pluck out a flower, mutilating in some way a bouquet given in love, is to expose the lover to death. She feared that Giulio would be growing impatient, and she rushed to the window; but when she got there, she feared that she could be seen all too well because of the lamp she had lit in her bedroom. Elena did not know what kind of sign she could permit herself to give him; it seemed to her that any sign at all would say too much.

Ashamed, she rushed back into her bedroom. Then some time passed; suddenly she had an idea that filled her with indescribable anxiety: Giulio was going to think that she, like her father, despised him for his poverty! She saw a little piece of precious marble on her

table; she knotted it up in a handkerchief and threw the handkerchief toward the foot of the oak across from her window. Then she made a gesture that he should go away; she heard Giulio obey her, because he now no longer took the trouble to walk softly. When he had reached the summit of the circle of rocks that separate the lake from the last houses of Albano, she could hear him singing words of love; she made him a sign of farewell, this time less timidly, and then she sat down to reread his letter.

The next day, and the days after that, there were similar letters and similar interchanges; but because there are no secrets in an Italian village, and because Elena was from what was by far the richest family in the region, Signor de Campireali was soon informed that every night at midnight a light could be seen in his daughter's room and, just as extraordinary, the window was open, and Elena acted as if she had no fear at all of *zanzare* (an extremely bothersome kind of gnat that ruins a great many otherwise fine soirees in Rome. And here I would beg the indulgence of the reader. When one wishes to understand the customs of foreign countries, one must be tolerant of ideas that seem quite crazy, quite different from our own). Signor de Campireali prepared his harquebus and that of his son. That evening, when eleven o'clock struck, he alerted Fabio, and the two of them slipped out, making as little sound as possible, onto a great stone balcony that stood on the first floor of the palazzo, directly beneath Elena's window. The massive pillars of the balustrade protected them up to chest level from any harquebus fire that might be aimed at them from outside. Midnight sounded; father and son could hear very clearly a light sound coming from beneath the trees that bordered the road across from their palazzo, but surprising them greatly, there was no light coming from Elena's window. This girl, so simple up to now,

so childlike in her vivacity, had changed her character with the onset of love. She knew that the slightest imprudence could threaten the life of her beloved; if some lord of the rank of her father killed a poor man like Giulio Branciforte, he would have to disappear for only three months, which he could spend in Naples; during that time, his friends in Rome would arrange matters, and everything would be paid for with the offering of a silver lamp costing a few hundred ecus for the altar of whatever Madonna was in fashion at the moment. That morning, at luncheon, Elena had divined from her father's expression that he was barely concealing a great rage, and from the way he looked at her when he thought he was not being observed, she divined that she had much to do with this rage. She quickly went off and sprinkled a thin layer of dust on the wooden stocks of the five superb *harquebuses* that her father kept on a rack near his bed. She also sprinkled a light layer of dust on his daggers and his swords. All day long, she put on a front of wild good spirits, rushing about the house from top to bottom; she constantly was at one of the windows, determined to make a negative signal to Giulio if she had the good luck to catch sight of him. But she never saw him: the poor boy had been so profoundly humiliated by the rich *Campireali's* insults that he never appeared in Albano during the daytime; only duty brought him there on Sunday for the parish Mass. Elena's mother, who adored her and could refuse her nothing, accompanied her out of doors three times that day, but it was all in vain; Elena never saw Giulio. She was in despair. And how much worse did she feel that evening when she returned to examine her father's weapons and saw that two of the guns had been loaded and nearly all the daggers and swords had been brought out. Her only distraction from mortal anxiety was the need to appear as if she suspected nothing. Upon retiring, at ten o'clock,

she locked the door of her bedroom that opened onto her mother's antechamber, and then she planted herself at the window, on the floor, in such a way that no one from below could see her. The reader can judge the anxiety with which she heard the hours sounding; it was no longer a question of reproaching herself for the rapidity with which she had become attached to Giulio, which might make her less worthy of love in his eyes. That day advanced the affairs of the young man more than six months of constancy and protestations would have. "Why should I lie?" Elena thought to herself. "Do I not love him with all my soul?"

At eleven-thirty, she could see her father and brother perfectly well as they placed themselves in their ambush behind the great stone balcony beneath her window. Two minutes after the Capuchin convent sounded midnight, she heard the footsteps of her lover, also perfectly well, as they came to a halt beneath the great oak; she noted with joy that her father and brother seemed to have heard nothing: such slight sounds can be heard only through the anxiety of love.

Now, she said to herself, they are going to kill me, but at all costs they must not get hold of tonight's letter; they would persecute poor Giulio forever. She made the sign of the cross, and then, holding on to the ironwork of her balcony with one hand, she leaned outside as far as she possibly could toward the street. Only a few seconds passed before the bouquet, attached as always to the long *canne*, flapped against her arm. She seized hold of the bouquet; but, in pulling it vigorously from the *canne* to which it had been fixed, she made that *canne* flap against the stone balcony. Immediately two harquebus shots sounded out, followed by perfect silence. Her brother Fabio, not knowing in the darkness whether what flapped against the balcony might be a rope to help Giulio descend from his sister's room, had

fired up at her balcony; the next day, she found the mark the bullet had made when it flattened against the ironwork. Signor de Campireali had fired toward the street, because Giulio had made some sound in pulling back the *canne* as it fell. Giulio, for his part, hearing the noise above his head, had divined what was about to follow and quickly hid himself beneath the balcony's overhang.

Fabio quickly reloaded his harquebus and, regardless of what his father might have been saying to him, ran off into the house's garden, silently opening the little door that opened onto a side street, and then came around, on tiptoe, to see who the people were who were walking below the balcony of the palazzo. At that moment Giulio, who was not alone that evening, found himself twenty paces away and flattened himself against a tree trunk. Elena, bent forward over her balcony and trembling for her lover, suddenly began a conversation with her brother at the top of her voice; she called to him down in the street and asked if he had killed the thieves.

"Don't think I'm falling for your criminal tricks!" he cried from the street that he was searching carefully; "but get your tears ready, because I am going to kill the insolent dog who dares to attack your window." He had barely finished when Elena heard her mother beating on the door to her room.

Elena hastened to open it, saying she could not imagine how it had come to be locked.

"No acting with me, my angel," said her mother; "your father is furious and may kill you; come and get into my bed next to me; and if you have a letter, give it to me, and I'll hide it for you."

Elena said, "Here is the bouquet; the letter is hidden among the flowers." The mother and daughter had scarcely got into the bed when Signor de Campireali came into his wife's room; he was com-

ing from her oratory, where he had overturned all the furniture. What particularly struck Elena was that her father, pale as a ghost, was moving about slowly and deliberately, like a man who has perfectly made up his mind. "I am dead," Elena said to herself.

"We are so happy when we have children," said her father as he passed his wife's bed on his way into his daughter's room, trembling with fury but affecting a calm and icy demeanor. "We are so happy when we have children, but we ought to weep tears of blood when those children are girls. Great God! Is it possible! Their loose morality can steal away the honor of a man who for sixty years has never let anyone have the slightest hold over him."

"I am lost," said Elena to her mother; "the letters are under the pedestal of the crucifix, next to the window." At that, her mother leaped out of bed and rushed to her husband; she began exclaiming the most irrational things possible, in an effort to redouble his anger: she succeeded brilliantly. The old man turned furious, breaking everything in his daughter's room; but the mother had snatched up the letters without being seen. One hour later, when Signor de Campireali was back in his own bedroom, next to his wife's, and the house was finally quiet, the mother said to her daughter:

"Here are your letters; I don't want to read them; you see what they have almost cost us! In your place, I would burn them. Adieu; kiss me."

Elena returned to her room, bursting into tears; it seemed somehow that after what her mother had just said, she no longer loved Giulio. Then she prepared to burn the letters; but before destroying them, she could not keep herself from rereading them. She reread them so much and so thoroughly that the sun was already high in the sky when she finally decided to follow that salutary advice.

The next day, which was a Sunday, Elena walked to the parish church with her mother; fortunately, her father did not follow them. The first person she saw in the church was Giulio Branciforte. She quickly assured herself that he had not been injured. Her happiness was at its peak; the events of the preceding night seemed a thousand miles away. She had prepared five or six little notes on small scraps of paper, each one rubbed with a little dirt and water so as to appear like the kind of scrap one might find on the floor of a church; each of these notes contained the same announcement:

They have discovered everything, except for his name. He must not come back to the street; one will return here often.

Elena let one of these scraps of paper fall; a glance signaled Giulio, who picked it up and vanished. Upon returning home an hour later, she found on the grand staircase a fragment of paper that attracted her attention, as it resembled those she had employed that morning. She picked it up without her mother's noticing; she read:

In three days he will return from Rome, where he is forced to go. One will sing in broad daylight, in the midst of the peasants' market, around ten o'clock.

This departure for Rome seemed unusual to Elena. She asked herself sadly if it was because he feared her father's harquebus. Love can pardon anything except voluntary absence; that is the worst of all possible tortures. Instead of passing the day in a sweet reverie, going over all the reasons why one loves one's lover, one is tossed and turned by cruel doubts all day long. "But after all," she asked herself during the three long days of Branciforte's absence, "is it possible that he no longer loves me?" Then, suddenly, all her sorrows were transformed

into a wild joy: it was the third day, and she saw him in broad daylight, walking down the street in front of her father's palazzo. He was wearing new and almost magnificent clothing. Never had the nobility of his carriage and the gay, courageous naïveté of his expression shown to better advantage; and also never had there been so much talk in Albano of Giulio's poverty. The men, and above all the young men, were the ones spreading the cruel talk; the women, and above all the young women, never ceased praising his good looks.

Giulio spent the whole day walking around the town; he appeared to be compensating for that long period of seclusion to which his poverty had condemned him. As is appropriate for a young man in love, Giulio was well armed underneath his new jacket. Apart from his dagger and his poniard, he had put on his *giacco* (which is a kind of chain-mail shirt, very awkward to wear, but one that cures Italian hearts of a sad malady that in that period gave people many sharp attacks—I mean the fear of being killed at any corner by one of the enemies one knew were on the lookout). On this day, Giulio hoped to run into Elena somewhere, and in any case, he did not feel like going home and being alone in his solitary house: this is why Ranuccio, a former soldier friend of his father's, after having gone through ten campaigns with him under various *condottieri* and, most recently, under Marco Sciarra, had followed his captain when the wounds of the latter forced him to retire. Captain Branciforte had his reasons for not living in Rome; he always ran the risk there of running into the sons of men he had killed; even in Albano he avoided allowing himself to be completely at the mercy of the duly constituted authorities. Instead of buying or renting a house in the town, he preferred to build one someplace where he could see who his visitors were from a great distance. He found a perfect spot among the ruins of Alba: here, he

could hide, without being seen by any indiscreet visitors, in the forest where his old friend and chief Prince Fabrizio Colonna reigned. Captain Branciforte did not bother himself worrying about his son's future well-being. When he retired from service, only fifty years old but riddled with wounds, he calculated that he might live another ten years, and therefore, once his house was built, he proceeded to spend, each year, a tenth of the sum he had amassed when he had had the honor of helping pillage nearby towns and villages.

He bought a vineyard that brought in thirty ecus in rent for his son as a kind of response to the ugly gibe a bourgeois in Albano had made one day when they were heatedly arguing about the competing interests of honor and town, to the effect that a wealthy landowner like himself was just the sort of person to give advice to the "elders" of Albano. The captain went off and purchased the vineyard, announcing that he planned to buy many more; then, when he met the sneering bourgeois in a secluded spot, he shot him dead with his pistol.

After eight years of this kind of life, the captain died; his aide-de-camp Ranuccio loved Giulio; sometimes, out of boredom, he would go back into service under Prince Colonna for a time. Often, he came back to visit "his son Giulio," as he called him, and on the eve of a dangerous assault that the prince had to fight off in his fortress at Petrella, he had brought Giulio to fight alongside him. Seeing how brave the young man was, he said:

"You must be mad, or even worse, a fool, to live up here outside of Albano like the lowest and poorest of its inhabitants when, given what I've just seen, along with your father's name and reputation, you could be a brilliant 'soldier of fortune' with us, and you could easily make your fortune." This tormented Giulio; he knew Latin, having

been taught it by the priest, but because his father had always mocked everything the priest said apart from Latin, Giulio had had no other education whatsoever. On the other hand, being despised for his poverty and living alone in his isolated house, he had developed a certain good sense that was hardy enough to have surprised the scholars. For example, before he fell in love with Elena and without knowing why, he loved warfare but detested pillaging, which, in the eyes of his father the captain and Ranuccio, was like the delightful little comic scene that comes after the noble tragedy. Since falling in love with Elena, that good sense which his solitary life had developed in him now tortured him. His soul, once so carefree, now dared not consult anyone about its doubts and fears, and as a result it was a soul racked by passion and misery. What would Signor de Campireali say if he heard he was a "soldier of fortune"? That would make his reproaches even more well founded. Giulio had always counted on an eventual profession of soldiering, once he had cashed in all the gold chains and other trinkets he had found in his father's iron chest. If Giulio had no compunction about carrying off, poor as he was, the daughter of the rich Signor de Campireali, it was because in those days, fathers disposed of their wealth as they saw fit, and Signor de Campireali could very well decide to leave his daughter a thousand ecus for her fortune. But another problem kept Giulio very much occupied: (1) Where and in what town would he and Elena set up their home, after he had married and carried her off from her father? (2) And upon exactly what money would they live?

When Signor de Campireali had spoken those painful words to him, those words he felt so deeply, Giulio spent two days in the deepest rage and misery: he could not decide whether to kill the insolent old man or allow him to live. He spent entire nights weeping; finally,

he decided to consult Ranuccio, the only friend he had in the world: but would this friend understand it? Vainly he searched for Ranuccio all through the forest of La Faggiola, and he was obliged to take the road to Naples, beyond Velletri, where Ranuccio was in charge of an ambush: he, along with a considerable company, was lying in wait for Ruiz d'Avalos, a Spanish general who was headed to Rome by land, having forgotten that recently he had spoken before a large group expressing contempt for the Colonna soldiers of fortune. His chaplain reminded him of this detail with some urgency, and Ruiz d'Avalos decided it would be best to equip a vessel and go to Rome by sea after all.

When Captain Ranuccio had heard Giulio's story, "Describe this Signor de Campireali precisely," he said, "so that his foolishness does not end up costing the life of some innocent inhabitant of Albano. As soon as our business here is finished one way or another, you should go to Rome, where you should make it a point to be seen in the inns and other public spots at all different hours of the day; we must not allow anyone to suspect you because of your love for the daughter."

Giulio had all he could do to calm his father's old companion down. Eventually, he lost his temper:

"Do you think I'm here to ask for your sword?" he said. "Look, I have a sword of my own! I'm asking for your thoughtful advice."

Ranuccio kept repeating these words: "You are young; you are unwounded; the insult was a public one; now, a man who is dishonored is despised even by women."

Giulio told him that he wanted time to think about what his heart really desired, and despite Ranuccio's insistence that he stay and take part in the attack on the Spanish general and his escort, in which, he

said, there would be honor to be won, not to mention the doubloons, Giulio went back alone to his little house. It was there, on the day before the one on which Signor de Campireali fired on him with his harquebus, that he received Ranuccio and his corporal, who had come from the neighborhood of Velletri. Ranuccio used force to pry open the little iron chest where his former captain, Branciforte, had locked up the gold chains and other trinkets that he had not cashed in immediately after an expedition. Ranuccio found two ecus in it.

"I would advise you to become a monk," he said to Giulio; "you have all the virtues: love of poverty, the proof of which is here; humility, because you let yourself be pushed around in public by some rich man in Albano; all you need are hypocrisy and gluttony."

Ranuccio insisted on putting fifty doubloons in the iron chest. He said to Giulio, "I give you my word that if one month from now this Signor de Campireali is not buried with all the honors due to his nobility and his high station, my corporal here will come back with thirty men and demolish your little house and burn your pathetic furniture. The son of Captain Branciforte must not appear a dishonorable figure in the world just because he is in love."

When Signor de Campireali and his son took their two harquebus shots, Ranuccio and his corporal had taken up a position beneath the stone balcony, and Giulio had all he could do to keep them from killing Fabio when the latter imprudently came out through the garden, as we have narrated in its proper place. The reason that calmed Ranuccio was this: it would not be right to kill a young man who might one day become something and be useful, not while an aged sinner much worse than him is still walking the earth unburied.

The day after this adventure, Ranuccio took refuge in the forest and Giulio left for Rome. The delight he felt in buying his new

clothes with the doubloons that had been given him was cruelly tempered by an idea quite unusual for that century, one that foreshadowed the elevated destiny that awaited him: "I must be sure that Elena knows who I really am." Any other young man of his age and his era would have no other thought beyond his love and carrying Elena off with him, and would never worry about what she would become six months later, nor of the opinion she might have of him.

Upon his return to Albano, on the very afternoon when Giulio was dazzling everyone with the new clothes he had brought back from Rome, he learned from Scotti, his old friend, that Fabio had left town on horseback to go three leagues away to an estate that his father owned in the plain near the sea. Later, he saw the elder Campireali, along with two priests, take the fine chestnut-lined road that leads to the crater where the lake of Albano is found. Ten minutes after that, an old woman boldly entered the Campireali palazzo under the pretext of selling some fine fruit; the first person she met was the little maid Marietta, the intimate confidante of her mistress, Elena, who blushed up to the whites of her eyes upon being given a pretty bouquet. The letter hidden in the bouquet was of an extreme length: Giulio recounted in detail everything he had felt on the night of the harquebus shots; yet, due to some unusual modesty, he dared not tell her what any other young man of his era would have been proudest of: that he was the son of a captain celebrated for his adventures and that he himself had shown himself to be brave in more than one combat. He always imagined that he could hear what thoughts such a revelation would engender in old Campireali. Now, in the sixteenth century, young women with something like good republican sensibilities esteemed a man far more for what he had actually done and made of himself than for the wealth his fathers had amassed or the exploits

of those fathers. But it was always, above all, the young women of the lower classes who felt this way. Those who belonged to the wealthy or noble classes were afraid of brigands and, naturally enough, felt a great attraction to nobility and opulence. Giulio ended his letter with these words:

I don't know if the more suitable clothes I brought back from Rome have made you forget the cruel insult addressed to me by a person you respect, regarding my pathetic appearance; I could have avenged myself, and I should have, for my honor demanded it; but I did not do so out of consideration for the tears my vengeance would have cost those eyes that I adore. This should prove to you, if it is my bad luck that you still doubt the fact—that one can be very poor and still have noble sentiments. I still have one horrible secret to reveal to you; I would never have any difficulty in telling it to any other woman; I don't know why, but I shudder at the thought of your knowing it. It might immediately destroy the love you feel for me; no protestation on your part would console me. I must read in your eyes the effect this avowal will have on you. One of these days, at nightfall, I will see you in the garden behind the palazzo. On that day, Fabio and your father will be absent; when I am sure that, despite their contempt for a poor, badly dressed man, they cannot keep us from having forty-five minutes or an hour of conversation, a man will appear below the windows of your house, showing the children a tame fox. Later, when the "Ave Maria" bell sounds,¹¹ you will hear a harquebus shot far away; at that moment, come to the garden wall and, if you are not alone, sing something. If there is silence, your slave will appear trembling at your feet and will tell you some things that may horrify you. As I wait for this day, so decisive and so terrible for me, I will no

longer risk presenting you a bouquet at midnight; but around two o'clock in the morning I will pass by singing and you, perhaps, stationed on the great stone balcony, will let a flower from your garden fall. And this may be the last mark of affection you ever show your unhappy Giulio.

Three days later, Elena's father and brother had gone off on horseback to an estate the Campireali owned by the sea; they needed to leave a little before sunset if they wanted to return around two o'clock in the morning. But just when they were about to depart, not only their two horses but all the farm's horses had disappeared. Shocked by this audacious robbery, they searched everywhere for their stolen horses, and found them only the next day in the old, thick forest by the sea. The two Campireali, father and son, were obliged to come back to Albano in a farmer's cart, drawn by oxen.

That night, Giulio was on his knees before Elena; it was a totally black night, and the poor girl was glad of the obscurity; she appeared for the first time before this man she loved so tenderly, who knew it perfectly well, but to whom, after all, she had never actually spoken.

She noticed one thing that gave her a little courage; Giulio seemed even paler and more trembling than she was. She saw him on his knees: "Truly, I'm in a state where I can hardly speak," he said to her. Then came some moments that seemed genuinely happy; they gazed upon each other but were unable to say a word, as motionless as a very expressive group of marble statues. Giulio was on his knees, holding Elena's hand; she, her head bent down, was looking at him attentively.

Giulio knew very well that, according to the counsel of his friends, young Roman debauchees, he should have tried something; but the

idea horrified him. At last, he was awakened from that state of ecstasy, and perhaps the highest happiness love can produce in us, by this idea: time was flying rapidly; the Campireali would be nearing their palazzo. He knew, with that scrupulous nature of his, that he would never achieve any lasting happiness until he had made his horrible avowal to his mistress, that terrible avowal which would have struck his Roman friends as the height of stupidity.

"I mentioned that there was something that I had to admit to you," he said to Elena finally. Giulio went very pale; he added, with great difficulty, as if he had lost his breath: "Perhaps I am about to see the end of those feelings that mean everything to me. You believe I am poor; that is not all: I am a brigand, and the son of a brigand."

At these words, Elena, daughter of a rich man and possessed of all the fears a girl of her caste is subject to, felt ill; she was afraid she was going to faint. "How miserable this will make Giulio," she thought; "he will think I despise him." He was on his knees. So as not to fall, she leaned upon him and then fell unconscious into his arms. As we can see, in the sixteenth century, people liked precise detail in their love stories. This is not because the intellect was passing judgment on the stories but because the imagination was feeling them, and the reader's passion blended with that of the characters. The two manuscripts we are following, and above all the one that uses several turns of phrase that are uniquely Florentine, give in great detail the story of all the meetings that followed this one. The sense of danger eradicated any guilt or remorse the young woman might have felt. And often, the dangers were extreme ones; but they only fanned the flames of those two hearts for whom every sensation that arose out of their love was a sensation of happiness. Many times, Fabio and his father came close to discovering them. They were enraged, thinking

they were being laughed at: public gossip had it that Giulio was the lover of Elena, and yet they were unable to discover them together. Fabio, an impetuous young man proud of his birth, suggested to his father that they have Giulio assassinated.

"As long as he remains alive," he argued, "my sister's life is in great danger. Who knows whether our honor will require us to dip our hands in the blood of that stubborn girl? She has sunk so far that now she doesn't even deny her love for him; you have observed how her only response to our reproaches is glum silence—well then, that silence is the death warrant for Giulio Branciforte!"

Signor de Campireali replied, "But remember what his father was. Of course, it would be easy for us to spend six months in Rome, and while we were gone this Branciforte would disappear. But who can say that this father of his, who even in the midst of his crimes was brave and generous, generous to the point of enriching many of his soldiers and remaining poor himself—who can say that this father doesn't still have friends, whether in the Duke de Monte-Mariano's service or in that of the Colonna, who are even now in the forest of La Faggiola, half a league from our home? In that case, we would all be massacred with no mercy at all, you, me, and maybe even your unfortunate mother."

The conversations between father and son, often repeated, were not hidden from Vittoria Carafa, the mother of Elena, and they brought her to the point of despair. These discussions between Fabio and his father eventually concluded that it was injurious to their honor to continue to peacefully tolerate the gossip that was everywhere in Albano. Because it was not prudent to make this young Branciforte disappear—this young man who, every day, appeared more insolent and now, dressed in his fine new clothes, pushed things

so far as to speak directly to Fabio or his father in public places—because of all this, they would have to decide on one of two alternatives, or perhaps both at once: the whole family would have to pick up and go to live in Rome, or Elena would have to be taken back to the Convent of the Visitation at Castro, where she would remain until they could find a suitable husband for her.

Elena had never really admitted her love to her mother: daughter and mother loved each other tenderly, they spent most of their daily lives together, and yet there was never a single word said on this subject that interested both of them almost equally. This one subject that was on both of their minds was finally put into words for the first time when the mother told her daughter that the question was whether the family should go live in Rome or whether the daughter herself should go spend a few years in the convent at Castro.

This conversation was imprudent on the part of Vittoria Carafa, and can be excused only by the mad tenderness she felt for her daughter. Elena, hopelessly in love, wanted to prove to her lover that she was not ashamed of his poverty and that her confidence in his honor was boundless. “Who would believe it!” exclaims the Florentine historian, “that after so many courageous meetings in the garden, each of them so close to ending in a horrible death, and even after one or two meetings in her own bedroom, Elena was still pure! Stalwart in her virtue, she suggested to her lover that she should come out of the palazzo around midnight and spend the rest of the night in his little house constructed out of the ruins of Alba, more than a quarter of a league away. They disguised themselves as Franciscan monks. Elena being rather tall, when dressed thus she seemed to be a young novice of eighteen or twenty. The part that is truly incredible, and which suggests that God’s hand was involved, is that as they took the narrow

road hewn through the rock that passes the Monastery of the Capuchins, Giulio and his mistress, disguised as monks, actually encountered Signor de Campireali and his son Fabio, who were followed by four well-armed domestics and preceded by a page bearing a lit torch, on their way back from Castel Gandolfo, a town situated on the shores of the lake not far away. In order to let the two lovers pass, the Campireali and their servants moved over to the right and to the left of the path, cut out of the rock and only about eight feet wide. How lucky it would have been for Elena if she had been recognized at that moment! She would have been killed by a pistol shot by either her father or her brother, and her agony would have lasted only a moment; but heaven had ordained it otherwise (*superis aliter visum*).¹²

“A further circumstance was added to the tale of this strange encounter many years later, when Signora de Campireali, who was then much advanced in years and almost a century old, would relate it sometimes in Rome to certain important personages who, very old themselves, have passed it on to me when my insatiable curiosity led me to interrogate them on this subject and many others.

“Fabio de Campireali, a young man of great pride, courage, and arrogance, observing that the elder of the two monks did not greet his father or himself as they passed, cried out: ‘Now that’s one conceited monk for you! God knows what he’s doing outside the monastery at this unheard-of hour! I feel like pulling off their cowls; we should have a look at their faces.’ Hearing this, Giulio gripped his dagger underneath his monk’s robe and placed himself between Fabio and Elena. At this point, he was only about one foot away from Fabio; but heaven had ordained it otherwise and miraculously calmed the furor of these two young men, who would soon be seeing each other just as closely.”

In the trial of Elena much later, it was asserted that this nocturnal promenade was proof of her corruption. It was the madness of a young heart inflamed with love, but that heart remained a pure one.

III

The reader must be told that the Orsini, eternal rivals of the Colonna and all powerful in the villages closest to Rome, had recently condemned to death, via the governmental tribunal, a wealthy farmer named Balthazar Bandini, from Petrella. It would take too much time to report here all the various deeds of which Bandini was accused: many of them would indeed be considered crimes today, but such things were not always viewed so strictly in 1559. Bandini was imprisoned in a castle belonging to the Orsini, located in the mountains near Valmontone, six leagues from Albano. The *bargello*, or sheriff, along with 150 of his *shirri*, spent a night on the high road; they came to find Bandini and escort him to Rome, to the prison of Tordinona; Bandini had appealed his death sentence to Rome. But, as we have said, he was a native of Petrella, where the fortress belonged to the Colonna; Bandini's wife had gone to appeal publicly to Fabrizio Colonna at Petrella: "Will you let them kill one of your faithful servants?" To this, Colonna replied: "May it please God that I never be found lacking in respect for the decisions made by the tribunal of my lord the pope!" His soldiers were immediately given orders, and he notified all his partisans to hold themselves at the ready. The meeting was to take place in the neighborhood of Valmontone, a small town built at the summit of a moderately high rock, but a single, almost perfectly vertical drop of from sixty to eighty feet formed its rampart. This was the town, belonging to the pope, to which the partisans of

the Orsini and the government *shirri* had succeeded in transporting Bandini. Among the most zealous supporters of these powers were Signor de Campireali and his son Fabio, who were, moreover, related to the Orsini, whereas Giulio Branciforte and his father had always been attached to the Colonna.

When a situation made it awkward for the Colonna to be seen operating openly, they made use of a very simple strategy: most wealthy Roman peasants, in those days just as in our own, belonged to some order of penitents. Penitents never appeared in public without their heads' being covered by a cloth cowl that also hides their faces, with two eyeholes cut out of it. When the Colonna did not want to admit their role in some enterprise, they invited their partisans to put on the penitents' habit before joining them.

After lengthy preparations, the transfer of Bandini, who had been the topic of gossip for two weeks, was planned for a Sunday. That day, at two o'clock in the morning, the governor of Valmontone had the alarm bells rung in all the villages of the forest of La Faggiola. Peasants came rushing out in great numbers from each village. (In the medieval republics, people would fight for the things they wanted, and this custom meant that the peasants' hearts retained a very real courage; in our day, the bell would ring and no one would so much as budge.)

On that particular day, one might have noticed one unusual thing: as soon as a little band of armed peasants left each village and went into the forest, their numbers were reduced by half; the partisans of Colonna broke off and headed for the meeting place that Fabrizio had designated. Their leaders seemed convinced there would be no battle that day: they had spread the word to that effect. Fabrizio traversed the forest with an elite group of his partisans, whom he had mounted

on young, half-wild horses chosen from his own stud. He performed a kind of review of the various detachments of peasants; but he did not speak a word, for fear of its being compromising. Fabrizio was a tall, thin man with an incredible agility and strength: though he was just forty-five, his hair and mustache were a bright white, which was an annoyance to him; it made him too easy to recognize in places where he would rather have been incognito. Whenever the peasants caught sight of him, they would shout, "Vive Colonna!" and begin to cover themselves with their cloth cowls. The prince himself had his cowl at the ready, hanging on his chest, so that he could quickly don it as soon as they caught sight of the enemy.

He did not have long to wait: the sun had barely risen when something like a thousand men could be seen, all on the Orsini side, coming into the forest from Valmontone and passing only about three hundred paces from the spot where the partisans of Fabrizio Colonna had been stationed hiding prone on the ground. A few minutes after the last of the Orsini men had filed past, the prince set his men in motion: he had resolved to mount his attack on the Bandini escort fifteen minutes after they had entered the forest. In this area, the forest is dotted with rocks some fifteen or twenty feet high: these are the results of lava flow, more or less ancient, upon which chestnut trees have taken root and grown up wonderfully, practically shutting out the sky entirely. And as these rocks, more or less eroded by time, make the ground very uneven, in order to avoid the main road's being a constant set of ascents and descents, the road has been formed by cutting into the lava so that it often sits three or four feet lower than the forest floor.

Near the spot Fabrizio had chosen for his attack, there was a grassy clearing, crossed at one end by the main road. Thereafter, the road reenters the forest, which at this point becomes almost impenetrable,

so thickly do the brambles and underbrush grow. Fabrizio stationed his foot soldiers one hundred paces deep into the forest on both sides of the road. At a signal from the prince, every peasant donned his cowl and took up his post with his harquebus behind a chestnut tree, with the prince's soldiers taking up posts behind the trees closest to the road. The peasants had strict orders not to fire until the soldiers had, and the soldiers were not to fire until the enemy was within twenty paces. Fabrizio had quickly had twenty trees cut down and thrown with all their branches across the road, which was narrow at that point and cut three feet below ground level, so as to block the road entirely. Captain Ranuccio, with five hundred men, took the advance guard; his orders were not to attack until he heard the first harquebus shots from the rampart of felled trees across the road. When Fabrizio Colonna saw his soldiers and his partisans all stationed behind their trees and all filled with determination, he took off at a gallop with his mounted men, among whom was Giulio Branciforte. The prince followed a path to the right of the main road, which led them to the side of the clearing farthest from the road.

The prince had been gone only a few minutes when there appeared in the distance, on the road from Valmontone, a great number of men on horseback; these were the *sbirri* and their *bargello* escorting Bandini, along with all the Orsini cavalry. In the midst of them was Balthazar Bandini, surrounded by four executioners all dressed in red; they had orders to execute the sentence that the first judges had imposed, that is, to put Bandini to death if they saw Colonna partisans about to free him.

Prince Colonna's cavalry had just arrived at the edge of the clearing or meadow farthest from the road when they could hear the first harquebus shots being fired from the ambush he had set up on the main road behind the blockade of felled trees. He immediately set his

cavalry at the gallop and directed his charge at the four red-clothed executioners surrounding Bandini.

We will not follow all the details of this little business, which lasted only about three-quarters of an hour; the Orsini partisans, surprised, ran off in all directions; but at the fight with the advance guard, the brave captain Ranuccio was killed, an event that had grave repercussions for the future destiny of Branciforte. The latter had dealt out only a few thrusts with his sword, always seeking to reach the men dressed in red, when he found himself face to face with Fabio Campireali.

Mounted on a bold, spirited horse and dressed in a golden *giacco* (a chain-mail jacket), Fabio cried out:

“Who are these masked wretches? Cut their masks off with your sabers; watch how I do it!”

At almost the same instant, Giulio Branciforte received a horizontal slash of the saber across his face. The strike had been so perfectly executed that the part of the cowl covering his face fell away, and at the same time he felt his eyes blinded and filling with blood gushing from the wound that was otherwise not very serious. Giulio turned his horse aside to catch his breath and to wipe his face. He wanted to avoid fighting Elena’s brother at all costs, and his horse was already four paces away from Fabio, but then he felt a furious saber blow against his chest, which failed to penetrate, thanks to his *giacco*, though it knocked the breath out of him. At the same time, he heard a voice shouting in his ear:

“*Ti conosco, porco*: you swine, I recognize you! So this is how you make the money to replace the rags you wore.”

Giulio, infuriated, forgot all about his resolution and turned to Fabio:

“*Ed in mal punto tu venisti!*” he cried.¹³

After they exchanged several sword thrusts, the shirts covering their chain mail were shredded and fell away. Fabio's chain mail was made of gold and was magnificent, whereas Giulio's was of a more common type.

"What gutter was that *giacco* of yours lying in?" Fabio cried.

At that very moment, Giulio found the chance he had been waiting for: the superb chain mail of Fabio did not protect his neck, and Giulio aimed his saber right at that partly exposed neck, and the point went in. It penetrated a full six inches deep into Fabio's throat, causing an enormous gushing of blood.

"Insolent!" exclaimed Giulio; and he galloped off toward the men dressed in red, who were still on horseback a hundred paces from him. As he neared them, the third one fell; but just when Giulio approached the fourth executioner, the latter, seeing himself surrounded by ten men on horseback, fired his pistol point-blank into the unlucky Balthazar Bandini, who fell to the ground.

"My good friends, we have nothing more to do here," cried Branciforte; "let us kill off those damnable *shirri* who are trying to escape any way they can." They all followed him.

A half hour later, when Giulio returned to the side of Fabrizio Colonna, the prince spoke to him for the first time in his life. Giulio found him mad with rage; he had expected to see him transported with joy, because the victory was complete and it was all because of his excellent planning; for the Orsini had almost three thousand men, and Fabrizio came into the battle with no more than fifteen hundred.

"We have lost your brave comrade Ranuccio," cried the prince to Giulio; "I just now touched his body; he is already cold. Poor Balthazar Bandini is mortally wounded. So this has been no victory. But the ghost of the brave Captain Ranuccio will come to Pluto in plenty

of company. I have given orders that every one of these wretched prisoners is to be hanged. Do not fail to do it, gentlemen." He added this last in an even firmer voice. And then, he turned and galloped off to the spot where the advance-guard battle had taken place. Giulio had been basically the second in command of Ranuccio's troops; he followed the prince, who, having arrived at the corpse of that brave soldier who lay surrounded by more than fifty enemy corpses, got down off his horse a second time to take the hand of Ranuccio. Giulio did the same, and he wept.

"You are still young," said the prince to Giulio, "but I see you covered in blood, and your father was a brave man who was injured more than twenty times in the service of the Colonna. Take over the command of what remains of Ranuccio's company, and escort his body to our church in Petrella; remember that you might be attacked along the way."

Giulio was not attacked, but he killed with a single saber thrust one of his soldiers who said he was too young to be a commander. This audacity succeeded, for Giulio was still covered with the blood of Fabio. All along the route, he saw men being hanged from the branches. That hideous spectacle, together with the deaths of Ranuccio and, even worse, of Fabio, drove him almost mad. His only hope was that no one would know who had conquered Fabio.

We shall skip over the military details. Three days after the battle, he was able to come back and spend a few hours in Albano; he told his companions that he had caught a fever in Rome and that he had had to spend the whole week in bed.

But everyone suddenly treated him with a very marked respect; even the most influential citizens were the first to greet him; a few of the more imprudent types even went so far as to address him as

“Signor Captain.” He walked past the Campireali palazzo several times, finding it entirely shut up, and, given that the new captain was very timid when it came to asking certain questions, it was not until the middle of the day that he was able to bring himself to say to Scotti, the old man who had always been kind to him:

“But where are the Campireali? I see their home is closed up.”

“My friend,” replied Scotti with a suddenly sad expression, “that is a name you should never speak again. Your friends are completely convinced that he was the one who attacked you, and they will say so everywhere they go; but still, he was the principal obstacle to your marriage, and, after all, his death leaves a sister immensely rich, a sister in love with you. One might add, since indiscretion is actually a virtue in this situation—one might add that she loved you to the point of going and visiting you at night in your little house in Alba. And thus, one might say, speaking as one on your side, that therefore you two were husband and wife before the fatal battle of Ciampi” (the name people in the area gave to the place where the battle we have described took place). The old man stopped here, because he saw that Giulio was in tears.

“Let’s go up to the inn,” Giulio said. Scotti went with him; they were given a room, and after they locked the door, Giulio asked the old man if he could tell him the tale of everything that had happened over the past week. Once that long narration was over:

“I can tell by your tears,” said the old man, “that nothing was premeditated in your behavior; but Fabio’s death is nonetheless a very cruel event for you. Elena absolutely must tell her mother that she was your spouse for some time before that.”

Giulio was silent, which the old man attributed to a praiseworthy discretion. Lost in a profound reverie, Giulio asked himself if Elena, wounded by the death of her brother, would be able to appreciate his

delicacy in the matter; he repented what had happened. Then, upon being asked, the old man told him frankly everything that had happened in Albano on the day of the battle. Fabio was killed at about six-thirty in the morning, some six leagues away from Albano, and yet—incredible though it seems—by nine o'clock, people were already talking about the death. Around noon, they saw the elder Campireali, weeping bitterly and leaning on his servants for support, betake himself to the Capuchin monastery. A little later, three of those good priests, mounted on the best horses Campireali owned and followed by a great many servants, took the road to the village of Ciampi close to where the battle had taken place. The elder Campireali wanted badly to accompany them, but they persuaded him not to, arguing that Fabrizio Colonna was in a rage (though no one knew why) and could very well do him harm if he were taken prisoner.

That night around midnight, the forest of La Faggiola looked as if it were on fire: but it was the great number of monks and all the poor of Albano, each with a lighted candle, going to recover the corpse of Fabio.

"I won't hide one other thing from you," said the old man, lowering his voice as if he were afraid of being overheard; "on the road leading to Valmontone and to Ciampi . . ."

"Well?" said Giulio.

"Well! This road passes in front of your house, and they say that when the corpse of Fabio reached that spot, blood spurted out of a ghastly wound in his neck."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Giulio, rising up out of his chair.

"Calm down, my friend," said the old man; "you understand that you must hear everything. And now I must tell you that your presence here today seems a little premature to me. If you do me the honor of asking my advice, captain, I would add that it would be best for you

to absent yourself from Albano for a month. I don't need to add that it would be very imprudent for you to be seen in Rome. No one knows what action the Holy Father might decide to take against the Colonna; some think he will agree to accept Fabrizio's declaration that all he knows about the battle of Ciampi is what he has heard from public rumor; but the governor of Rome, who is a true-blue Orsini, is enraged and would be delighted to hang one of those brave soldiers of Fabrizio, and the latter could not really complain, since he swears he had no part in the battle. I will go even further, and even though you have not asked me for it, I will take the liberty of offering you some military advice: you are loved in Albano; otherwise you would not be safe here. Consider that you have been walking around the town for several hours while some Orsini supporter might think you are daring him to do something or maybe at least begin to think that you are giving him the opportunity to earn a healthy reward. The elder Campireali has said a thousand times that he would give his finest estate to the person who kills you. You should have brought along some of the soldiers you have at your house."

"But I don't have any soldiers in my house."

"In that case, you are a madman, my captain. This inn has a garden; let us leave through the garden and slip off across the vineyard; but if we encounter anyone with bad intentions, I will try to talk to them and at least buy you some time."

Giulio's soul was devastated. Dare we reveal the insane thought he had been entertaining? As soon as he had learned that the Campireali palazzo was closed and that all the family had gone to Rome, he had begun to plan a visit to the garden where he had so often met with Elena. He was hoping also to revisit her bedroom, where he had met her when her mother had been absent. He needed to reassure

himself, as a kind of defense against her anger, by seeing again those places where she had felt so tenderly toward him.

Branciforte and the good-hearted old man had no unpleasant encounters as they followed the narrow pathways across the vineyard and up toward the lake.

Giulio had him recount again the details of young Fabio's funeral. The brave young man's body, escorted by many priests, was conducted to Rome and buried in his family's chapel in the Convent of Sant'Onofrio, on the summit of the Janiculum. People especially remarked on one unusual thing: the day before the ceremony, Elena was taken by her father to the Convent of the Visitation at Castro; this was taken as confirmation of the rumor that she had been secretly married to the soldier of fortune who had had the bad luck to kill her brother.

When he approached his house, Giulio found his company's corporal, along with four of his soldiers; they told him that their former captain had never left the forest without taking some of his men with him. The prince had often said that anyone who wanted to get himself killed through his own imprudence must first resign his commission so as to free him from having another death to avenge.

Giulio Branciforte understood the point of such ideas, though until now he had never encountered them. He had believed, just as primitive peoples do, that war consists simply in fighting bravely. He immediately obeyed the prince's orders; he took the time only to embrace the wise old man who had had the generosity of accompanying him to his house.

But a few days later, Giulio, half mad with melancholy, returned to gaze upon the Campireali palazzo. At nightfall, he and three of his soldiers, disguised as Neapolitan merchants, sneaked into Al-

bano. He went by himself to the house of Scotti; he learned that Elena was still sequestered in the Castro convent. Her father, who believed that she was married to the murderer of his son, had sworn never again to lay eyes upon her. He had not even looked at her when he took her to the convent. But her mother's love seemed only to grow, and she often left Rome in order to spend a day or two with her daughter.

I V

"If I fail to justify myself to Elena," Giulio said to himself at night as he returned to the area of the forest his company occupied, "she will end up believing I am a murderer. God only knows what stories they have made up and told her about that fatal combat!"

He went to be given his orders from the prince at his stronghold in Petrella and asked him then for permission to go to Castro. Fabrizio Colonna frowned:

"The subject of this little battle has not yet been settled with His Holiness. You should know that I have told him the whole truth, that is to say, that I remain perfectly ignorant of the whole matter, and I heard about it only the next day, here in my castle at Petrella. I have every reason to believe that His Holiness eventually will grant credit to this sincere avowal. But the Orsini are powerful, and everyone tells me that you distinguished yourself in that little skirmish. The Orsini go so far as to claim that many prisoners were hanged from the branches of the trees. You know very well how false that story is; but one can predict that there will be reprisals."

The profound astonishment playing across the face of the naive

young captain amused the prince; he soon saw that it would be useful for him to speak somewhat more directly.

"I can see in you," he continued, "that total bravery which has made all Italy recognize the name of Branciforte. I hope that you will have the fidelity to me and my house that made your father so dear to me and that I would like to reward in you. Here is the one command that my company is always to follow: never tell the truth about anything that has anything to do with me or my soldiers. If, in the moment when you are forced to speak, you cannot find any useful lie to tell, then speak lies at random, and avoid telling even the most trivial truth as you would avoid a mortal sin. That trivial truth, you know, could be combined with others and put people on my track, or on the track of my projects. And of course I know that you have a beloved in the Convent of the Visitation at Castro; you may go ahead and waste a couple of weeks in that small town, where the Orsini are bound to have friends and even agents. Go on to my steward, who will give you 200 sequins. The friendship I had for your father," added the prince, smiling, "makes me feel like giving you some advice as to how best to manage this amorous and military affair. You and three of your soldiers should disguise yourselves as merchants; make it a point to quarrel with one of your men, who will pretend to always be drunk and who will make a great many friends by paying for drinks for all the idlers in Castro. . . . Then," added the prince, changing his tone, "if you are taken by the Orsini and put to death, never admit what your true name is, and even less whom you belong to. I don't have to remind you to go the long way around every village and to enter from the side opposite to that you're coming from."

Giulio was touched by this paternal counsel, coming from a man

who was ordinarily so severe. The prince smiled at the tears he saw coming from the eyes of the young man; then his voice, too, altered. He removed one of the numerous rings he wore; as he received the gift, Giulio kissed the hand that had performed so many grand actions.

“My father never spoke to me like this!” said the young man glowingly.

The next day, a little before dawn, he entered the walls of the little town of Castro; five soldiers were with him, disguised in the same manner as he was: two of them made up their own unit, acting as if they did not know either him or the others. Before they had even entered the town, Giulio saw the Convent of the Visitation, a huge building surrounded by blackened walls, looking more like a fortress than a convent. He hurried to the church; it was splendid. The nuns, all aristocratic and most of them from wealthy families, vied among themselves out of pride to see who could contribute more to enriching this church, the only part of the convent that the public was allowed to see. A tradition had evolved that the woman the pope named as abbess, chosen from a list of three names presented to him by the cardinal protector of the Order of the Visitation,¹⁴ would make a considerable donation meant to eternize her name. Anyone who made an offering inferior to that of the preceding abbess was despised, along with her family.

Giulio advanced, trembling, into this magnificent edifice, resplendent in marble and gold. In truth, though, he was hardly thinking of marble or gold; he felt as if Elena’s eyes were upon him. The great altar, it was said, had cost more than 800,000 francs; but his gaze, disdainful of the altar’s riches, was directed instead to a gilded grill, some forty feet tall and separated into three parts by two marble pillars. This

grill, its massiveness making it seem somehow a thing of terror, rose up behind the great altar, separating the choir area, where the nuns would sit, from the rest of the church, open to all the faithful.

Giulio told himself that, during church services, behind that gilded grill would be found the nuns and the boarders. And when a nun or a boarder felt the need to pray, at any hour, she would come to that interior church; and it was upon that circumstance, perfectly well known to everybody, that the hopes of the poor lover were founded.

It was true that an immense black curtain covered the inner side of the grill; "but that curtain," Giulio said to himself, "must not really obscure the view of the exterior church from the boarders, because I, even though I'm some distance away, can very clearly see the windows that give the choir light, and I can even see the slightest architectural details." Every bar of that magnificent gilded grill was ornamented with a strong spike that pointed out toward the worshippers.

Giulio picked out a very obvious spot across from the left-hand side of the grill, in the brightest part of the church; and there he proceeded to attend masses. Since he was always surrounded only by peasants, he hoped he would be noticed, even through the black curtain that covered the inner side of the grill. For the first time in his life, the young man sought out how to make the right effect; his clothes were carefully chosen; he made a show of distributing alms both coming in the church and leaving it. He and his friends did many thoughtful turns for all the merchants and craftsmen who had any working relationship with the convent. But it was only on the third day that he had some hope of getting a letter in to Elena. He had ordered his men to follow the two lay sisters who were in charge of buying supplies for the convent; one of them had a relationship with a

local merchant. One of Giulio's soldiers, who had been a monk, made friends with the man and promised him a sequin for every letter delivered to the boarder Elena de Campireali.

"What?" exclaimed the merchant when the topic was first broached, "a letter *to the wife of the brigand?*" The name had already been well established in Castro, and it had been only two weeks since Elena's arrival—which shows how quickly anything that catches the imagination circulated among these people, who had such a love for precise details.

The merchant added:

"Well, at least this one is married! But plenty of the other ladies have no such excuse, and they receive a lot more than letters."

In that first letter, Giulio told in great detail everything that had happened on the fatal day of battle that led to Fabio's death. He ended the letter by asking, "Do you hate me?"

Elena responded in only a line that, without hating anybody, she was going to spend the remainder of her life trying to forget the man at whose hands her brother had perished.

Giulio wrote back quickly; after opening with several lamentations about fate, the kind of thing inspired by Plato and quite in fashion at the time:

So you want me to forget the word of God transmitted to us through the Holy Scriptures? God said, "The woman shall quit her family and follow her husband."¹⁵ Do you dare to pretend that you are not my wife? Remember the night of Saint Peter's Day. Just as dawn appeared behind Monte Cavi, you threw yourself down at my feet; I wanted to be merciful toward you; you were mine, if I had chosen to take you; you could no longer resist the love you felt for me. Just then,

the idea struck me that if I had offered you the sacrifice of my life and of everything I held dearest in the world, as I had often told you, perhaps you might think that all these sacrifices were only imaginary, that I had performed no concrete act to prove it. Now an idea, a cruel one to me but profoundly right, illuminated everything for me. I thought that it was no accident that fate had offered me this chance to demonstrate my sacrifice by giving up, for your sake, what would have been the greatest happiness I could ever have imagined. You were already in my arms and defenseless, remember; even your lips could not refuse. And at just that moment, the morning “Ave Maria” rang out from the church of Monte Cavi, and by a miraculous chance the sound reached all the way to us. You said to me: “Make this sacrifice for the Holy Madonna, the mother of all purity.” I had already, just the moment before, conceived the idea of this supreme sacrifice, the only real thing I had had occasion to give up. I found it wonderful that the same idea had come to you. The distant sound of that “Ave Maria” touched me, I admit it; I agreed with what you asked for. My sacrifice was not entirely for you; I had the idea of putting our future union under the protection of the Madonna. At that time, I thought that any obstacles would come not from you—faithless you—but from your rich and noble family. If there was no supernatural intervention, how could that Angelus so far away possibly have reached us, through the obstruction of half the trees in the forest, all agitated at that moment by the morning winds? And then—do you remember?—you knelt before me; I rose up, and I took from my neck this cross I wear, and you swore on that cross, which is before me as I write this, and on pain of eternal damnation, that no matter where you were, no matter what might have happened, whenever I called for you, you would come and be mine entirely, just as you were at the

moment the "Ave Maria" from Monte Cavi came from so far away to strike your hearing. We then said two "Aves" and two "Pater Nosters." Well then! By the love you then felt for me and, in case you have forgotten, which I fear that maybe you have, by your eternal damnation, I command you to receive me tonight, in your room or in the garden of the Convent of the Visitation.

The Italian historian provides in detail many long letters written by Giulio Branciforte after this one; but he gives only extracts of the replies by Elena de Campireali. But now that 278 years have passed, we are so far from the kind of love and religious sentiments that fill these letters that I fear they would only be tedious.

It would appear from her replies that Elena did obey the order given in the letter we have just translated in an abbreviated form. Giulio found a means of getting inside the convent; it seems, in short, that he disguised himself as a woman. Elena did receive him, but only through a grate in a ground-floor window looking out on the garden. To his inexpressible sorrow, Giulio found that this young woman, so tender and even so passionate before, had become like a stranger to him; she treated him almost *politely*. In letting him into the garden, she had given in to the oath she had made. Their meeting was brief: after a few moments, Giulio's pride, excited perhaps by the events of the last couple of weeks, overcame his deep sorrow. He said to himself, "I see before me only the tomb of that Elena who, in Albano, seemed to give herself to me for life."

But right now, the important thing for Giulio was to hide the tears streaming down his face at the polite phrases Elena was using with him. When she had finished speaking and justifying what she called

so natural a change after the death of her brother, Giulio replied very slowly:

"You are not fulfilling your vow; you are not welcoming me in this garden; you are by no means on your knees before me the way you were when we heard that 'Ave Maria' from Monte Cavi. Forget your promise if you can; as for me, I shall never forget any of it. May God help you!"

Saying this, he turned away from the window's grate, where he could have remained for almost an hour longer. Who would have predicted a few minutes earlier that he would voluntarily cut short this meeting that he had so desired! This new sacrifice was like a wound in his soul; but he thought he would deserve Elena's contempt if he responded to those polite phrases of hers in any way other than leaving her alone with her remorse.

He exited the convent before dawn. He quickly mounted his horse, giving his soldiers the order to remain and await him in Castro for one whole week and at that point, if he was not back, to return to the forest; he was mad with despair. First, he headed toward Rome. "What am I doing—I'm going further away from her!" he exclaimed to himself at every step; "how can it be—we have become strangers to each other! Oh, Fabio, how well you are avenged!" The sight of other men on the road with him only heightened his rage; he turned his horse off the road and rode across the fields, heading toward the wild, uncultivated, and deserted seashore. When he was no longer troubled by the sight of calm and happy peasants whose lives he envied, he stopped to breathe; the sight of that savage tract of land accorded well with his despair and helped diminish his rage; he slowly turned to contemplating his sad destiny.

"At my age," he said to himself, "I have one recourse: fall in love with another woman!" But that unhappy thought only deepened his despair; he could see very well that there was really only one woman in the world for him. He imagined the torture it would be to try to speak of love to someone other than Elena; the idea tore at him.

He was seized by a sudden bitter laughter. "Here I am," he thought, "just like one of the heroes in Ariosto who journey off alone into desert countries trying to forget that they have discovered their traitorous mistresses in the arms of some other knight. . . . But she is not guilty like that." And with that, his outburst of mad laughter turned into one of tears. "Her infidelity doesn't go so far as to involve loving someone else. That pure, vibrant soul has let herself be blinded by the horrible stories they tell her about me; they no doubt depict me as picking up my weapons that day *only* because I had hopes of finding the chance to kill her brother. They would have gone even further, telling her that I was capable of making sordid calculations, figuring that once her brother was dead, she would inherit great wealth. . . . And I was stupid enough to leave her alone for two whole weeks, alone and at the mercy of the seductions of my enemies! I have to admit that, unfortunate as I am, heaven also deprived me of the basic intelligence I ought to have in leading my life! I am completely miserable, completely detestable! My life has been no good to anyone, and even less to myself."

At that, young Branciforte had a sudden inspiration of a kind rare in that century; his horse was walking along the edge of the water, its hooves sometimes hidden under the waves; he had the idea of turning and walking into the sea, thus putting an end to the horrible fate that preyed upon him. What would he do from now on, after the only creature in the world who could give him any happiness had aban-

doned him? Then, suddenly, a different idea took hold of him: "What are the sufferings I'm enduring now," he asked himself, "compared to the ones I'll be enduring in a moment, after I've ended my miserable life? Then, Elena will no longer be just indifferent to me, as she is now; then, I will see her in the arms of some rival, some young Roman noble, rich and 'respected'; because, in order to lash my soul effectively, the demons will go off and seek out the cruelest possible images, which is their duty. So I will never be able to forget Elena, even in death; even worse, my passion for her will only grow, because that is the surest means the eternal powers will be able to find to punish me for the hideous mortal sin I have committed." To chase away the temptation, Giulio began reciting the "Ave Maria." It was in hearing the "Ave Maria," that prayer consecrated to the Madonna, when it sounded that morning, that he had been seduced and had been pulled into an action so generous that he now regarded it as the greatest mistake of his life. But out of a sense of respect, he did not go further now and fully express the idea that was forming in his mind. "If it was through the inspiration of the Madonna that I fell into this fatal error, doesn't she owe it to her infinite justice to create some circumstance that will make me happy again?" This thought of the Madonna's infinite justice began to dissipate his despair. He raised his head and saw before him, behind Albano and the forest, that same Monte Cavi, covered by its dark verdure, and the holy convent from which the morning "Ave Maria" had led him into what he now regarded as vile gullibility. The unexpected sight of that holy place consoled him. "No," he cried; "it is impossible that the Madonna will abandon me. If Elena had been my wife, as her love impelled her to be and as my male dignity demanded, hearing of her brother's death would have awakened in her only memories of the bonds linking her

to me. She would have told herself that she belonged to me long before that fatal chance that put me face-to-face with Fabio on a battlefield. He was two years older than me; he was more expert in arms, bolder in every respect, stronger. A thousand thoughts would have crowded into my wife's mind to convince her that I had not sought out this combat. She would have remembered that I had never felt the slightest bit of hatred for her brother, not even when he had aimed his harquebus and shot at me. I remember that when we first met after my trip to Rome, I said to her, 'What do you expect? Honor required it; I cannot blame a brother!'" Thus returned to hope through his devotion to the Madonna, Giulio spurred his horse and in a few hours arrived at the quarter occupied by his company. He found them taking up arms: they were going toward the road from Naples to Rome that passes by Monte Cassino. The young captain changed horses and went off with his soldiers. There was to be no battle that day. Giulio did not even ask why they were on the march; it didn't matter to him. When he saw himself at the head of his soldiers, he had a new vision of his destiny. "I really am a fool," he said to himself; "I was wrong to leave Castro; Elena is probably less guilty than she seemed in my anger. No, she could not have ceased being mine, that soul so innocent, so pure, in which I've seen the first feelings of love stir and grow! She was penetrated through and through with a sincere passion for me. Didn't she offer, a dozen times, to run off with me, poor as I was, and to go have a monk from Monte Cavi marry us! At Castro, I should have arranged a second meeting and spoken reason to her. Oh, these passions whirl me around as if I were a child! God! If only I had a friend I could turn to for advice! The same idea seems execrable one minute and excellent the next!"

That evening, as they left the main road to go off into the forest,

Giulio approached the prince and asked if it would be all right for him to spend a few more days at that place he knew of.

"Oh, a thousand devils take you!" Fabrizio cried. "Do you really think this is the right moment for me to be preoccupied with this childishness?"

An hour later, Giulio set off for Castro. He found his men there; but he did not know how to write to Elena after leaving her the way he had. His first letter consisted only of these words: "Would you see me tomorrow night?"

"You may come" was the entirety of her response.

After Giulio's departure, Elena believed herself to have been permanently abandoned. And it was then that she felt the full force of his logic, that unhappy young man; she had been his wife before he had the bad fortune of encountering her brother on a battlefield.

This time, Giulio was not treated with those merely polite turns of phrase that had seemed so cruel to him on their first meeting. Elena, true, appeared to him only behind the grating of her window; but she was trembling, and, because Giulio had adopted the very reserved tone and language¹⁶ that one would use with a stranger, it was Elena's turn to feel how cruel such formal, official-sounding language was when it replaces that of sweet intimacy. Giulio, who greatly feared having his heart broken by some cold word from Elena, had taken on the tone of a lawyer to prove to her that she had been his wife well before the fatal battle of Ciampi. Elena let him speak, because she feared becoming overwhelmed by tears if she replied in anything other than monosyllables. Soon, finding herself about to betray her true state, she asked Giulio to return the next day. That evening, which was the eve of a major feast day, matins was to be sung early, and thus they had to be concerned that someone might see them. Giulio, who was

reasoning the way lovers do, left the garden deep in thought; he was not certain whether he had been received well or not well; and because of his conversations with his friends, military ideas were now beginning to form in his mind. "One day," he said to himself, "I may have to come here and carry Elena off." And he began to examine ways one might fight one's way into the garden. Because the convent was very rich and contained much to tempt thieves, it employed a great many servants, the majority of whom were former soldiers; they were lodged in a sort of barracks with barred windows opening onto the narrow passage, hewn out of a blackened wall more than eighty feet tall that led from the convent's exterior door to the interior door, which was guarded by a sister who acted as portress. To the left of this narrow passage stood the barracks, and to the right the garden wall, more than thirty feet high. The convent's facade, on the city square, was a rough wall blackened with age, offering no openings except the exterior door and a single small window through which the soldiers could keep watch on the square. One can imagine the somber feeling aroused by the sight of that great black wall pierced only by a single door, reinforced with broad steel bands attached by enormous nails, and by a single little window about four feet high and eighteen inches wide.

We will not follow our original historian in his long recitation of the successive conversations Giulio had with Elena. The tone of the two lovers gradually reverted to one of perfect intimacy, as it had been in the garden at Albano; but Elena never consented to come out into the garden. One night, Giulio found her deeply thoughtful: her mother had arrived from Rome and was going to spend several days at the convent. Her mother was so tender, and she had always shown such delicacy and tact regarding what she thought were her daugh-

ter's affections, that Elena felt a deep remorse at having to dupe her; for, after all, did she dare tell her that she was receiving visits from the man who had killed her son? Elena admitted frankly to Giulio that if her mother, who was so good to her, asked her certain questions, she would be unable to lie to her. Giulio felt the danger of his position; his fate depended on the chance that someone might say something to Signora de Campireali. The next night, he said, with a resolute air:

"Tomorrow I will come earlier; I will detach one of the bars from this grill; you will come down into the garden, and I will conduct you to a church in the town, where a priest friendly to me will marry us. Before daylight, you will be back in this garden. Once you are my wife, I will have no fear, and if your mother demands some kind of expiation for the horrible misfortune that we all equally deplore, I will consent to anything, even if it is to not see you for several months."

And when Elena appeared dismayed by this plan, Giulio added:

"The prince orders me to return to him; honor and all sorts of other reasons oblige me to go. My plan is the only one that will assure our future together; if you do not consent, let us part forever, right now, right here. I will leave feeling remorse at my own rashness. I believed in your word of honor; you are being unfaithful to your most sacred oath, and I hope that eventually the just contempt I feel about your lack of integrity will help cure me of this love that, for too long now, has been the misery of my life."

Elena burst into tears:

"Good God!" she exclaimed as she wept. "What horror for my mother!"

At last, she did consent to the plan that he had outlined.

"But," she added, "we might be discovered, either leaving or

returning; think what a scandal that would be and the horrible position it would put my mother in; let us wait until she leaves, a few days from now."

"You have succeeded in making me doubt the one thing that to me was the holiest, the most sacred: my trust in your word. Tomorrow night we will be married, or else we are right now seeing each other for the last time on this side of the grave."

Poor Elena could answer only with tears, she was so hurt by the cruel, decided tone Giulio had taken. Did she really deserve his contempt? And this was the lover who had been so meek and so tender! Finally, she did consent to what he demanded. Giulio departed. Immediately, Elena began to await the next night, with one dreadful anxiety giving rise to another. If she had been preparing for certain death, her misery would have been less poignant; she could have found some courage in the idea of her love for Giulio and her tender affection for her mother. The rest of the night was passed in making one painful resolution after another. There were moments when she wanted to tell her mother everything. The next day, she was so pale when she appeared before her mother that the latter, forgetting all her own wise resolutions, took her daughter in her arms and exclaimed:

"What is going on? Great God! Tell me what you have done, or what it is you're about to do. If you took a dagger and plunged it into my heart, you would make me suffer less than this cruel silence you observe with me."

Her mother's extreme tenderness was so clear to Elena, and she could see so clearly that her mother, far from exaggerating her feelings, was doing her best to repress them, that at last her own feelings overwhelmed her; she fell to her knees. As her mother was trying to learn what this fatal secret could be and exclaiming that Elena was

trying to avoid her, Elena replied that the next day and every day after that, she would spend her life close to her, but she begged her now not to ask her anything more.

That ill-considered phrase was soon followed by a complete confession. Signora de Campireali was horrified to learn that the murderer of her son was so close by. But that sorrow was followed by a burst of powerful, pure joy. Who could describe the rapture she felt when she learned that her daughter had never failed in her moral duty?

Immediately, the prudent mother changed all her plans; she felt she would be blameless in deploying a ruse against a man who meant nothing to her. Elena's heart was battered by all the cruelest feelings possible: the sincerity of her confession was as profound as it could be; her soul, racked by remorse, desperately needed to unburden itself. Signora de Campireali, who now felt that everything was permitted, invented a whole series of arguments too lengthy to repeat here. She easily proved to her unhappy daughter that instead of a clandestine wedding, which always leaves some stain upon a woman's reputation, she would instead have a public and perfectly honorable one, but only if she would be willing to put off for one week the act of obedience she owed to so generous a lover.

She, Signora de Campireali, was going to return to Rome; she would tell her husband that Elena had been married to Giulio well before the fatal battle of Ciampi. The ceremony had taken place on the very night that she, disguised as a monk, had encountered her father and brother by the lake on that path hewn out of the rock face that forms the walls of the Capuchin monastery. The mother was careful not to leave her daughter alone all that day, and finally, when evening came, Elena wrote her lover an innocent and, in our view, a

very touching letter, in which she narrated the conflicts that had so racked her heart. She concluded by asking him, on her knees, for a delay of one week: "As I write this letter to you now," she added,

which my mother's messenger is waiting for, I feel that I did the worst possible thing in telling her everything. I imagine you angry, imagine your eyes looking upon me with hatred; my heart is riven with the bitterest remorse. You will say that my character is too weak, too faint-hearted, even contemptible, and I admit it all, my dear angel. But picture it, please: my mother reduced to tears and practically on her knees. At that point, it was impossible for me not to give her some reason for why I could not do what she wanted; and once I had stumbled and said that imprudent thing, I don't know what came over me, but it somehow became impossible not to tell her everything that had happened between us. As best I can understand it now, I think it was a matter of my heart being so weakened that it simply needed counsel. I was hoping to find it in a mother's words. . . . And I forgot only too completely, my friend, that this beloved mother's interests are entirely opposed to yours. I forgot my primary duty, which is to obey you, and evidently I am incapable of feeling true love, which they say conquers all obstacles. Despise me, Giulio, but in God's name, do not stop loving me. Carry me off if you wish, but do me the justice to think that if it had not been for my mother's presence here at the convent, the most horrible dangers, shame itself, nothing in the world could have stopped me from obeying your command. But this mother of mine is so good! She is so intelligent! She is so generous! Remember what I told you back then; when my father had gone into my bedroom, she rescued those letters of yours that I had no means of hiding; and then, when the danger had passed, she returned them to me with-

out reading them and without uttering a single word of reproach! Well—all my life, she has been to me like that, just the way she was at that supreme moment. You can see that I ought to love her, but, as I write to you now (this is a horrible thing to say) I feel as if I hate her. She told me that, because of the heat, she wants to sleep in a tent out in the garden; I can hear the hammers at work, setting up a tent for her; it is impossible for us to meet tonight. I am afraid that they are even locking the boarders' dormitory tonight, along with the two doors that lead to the spiral staircase, which is never done. All these precautions make it impossible for me to come down to the garden, even if I thought that such a thing would help soothe your anger. Oh, how completely would I give myself to you right now, if only there was some way! How I would run to that church where they are going to marry us!

The letter goes on with two more pages of wild expressions, in which I detect some impassioned ideas that seem to me to stem from Plato's philosophy. I have suppressed many elegant passages of that type in the letter translated here.

Giulio Branciforte was stunned to receive the letter just one hour before the evening "Ave Maria"; he had just finished making arrangements with the priest. He flew into a rage. "She has no reason to worry about me carrying her off, that weak, feeble creature!" And he quickly left for the forest of La Faggiola.

And what was Signora de Campireali's state at this time? Her husband was on his deathbed, for his inability to avenge himself on Branciforte had eaten at him and had been slowly conducting him to his grave. In vain had he offered rich rewards to Roman *bravi*; no one had wanted to try to attack one of the *caporali*, as people called them,

attached to Prince Colonna; it was only too certain that anyone who tried would be exterminated, along with his whole family. Less than a year ago, an entire village had been burned to the ground as punishment for the death of one of the Colonna soldiers, and all the inhabitants, men and women, though they tried to flee into the countryside, had had their hands and feet tied up with ropes, and then they were all thrown into the burning houses.

Signora de Campireali owned some large estates in the kingdom of Naples; her husband had ordered her to call up some assassins from there, but she only pretended to obey him: she believed her daughter was irrevocably connected to Giulio Branciforte. With that assumption in mind, she thought that Giulio should go join a campaign or two with the armies of Spain, which were then making war on some rebels in Flanders. If he were to survive, she thought, that would be a sign that God did not disapprove of a necessary marriage; in that case, she would give one of her Naples estates to her daughter; Giulio Branciforte could adopt the name of the estate, and he with his wife could go spend several years in Spain. After all these trials, perhaps, she would have the courage to see him. But now everything had changed, with her daughter's confession: the marriage was no longer necessary; far from it, and while Elena was writing the letter that we have translated, Signora Campireali was writing to Pescara and Chieti, ordering her farmers there to send a group of trustworthy men capable of bold action to Castro. And she did not hide the fact that it was a matter of avenging the death of her son Fabio, their young master. The courier carrying these letters left before the end of the day.

But two days after that, Giulio had returned to Castro, and he brought with him eight soldiers who had been willing to follow him, even at the risk of arousing the anger of the prince, who sometimes had had men executed for engaging in this kind of enterprise. Giulio already had five men in Castro, and he brought another eight, but fourteen soldiers, no matter how brave they were, seemed to him to be too few for this enterprise, for the convent was like a strong fortress.

First, it was a matter of getting through the first of the convent's gates, by force or by skill; then, it was a matter of following a passage of some fifty paces. On the left of this passage, as we have already described, arose the grilled windows of a sort of barracks, where the nuns had stationed thirty or forty servants, former soldiers. From these windows intense gunfire could be expected once the alarm had been raised.

The current abbess, who was no fool, was afraid of the exploits of the Orsini chiefs, of Prince Colonna, of Marco Sciarra, and of all the other chiefs who reigned in the vicinity. How could the convent resist 800 determined men once they had occupied a small town like Castro thinking the convent was filled with gold?

Normally, the Visitation of Castro had fifteen or twenty *bravi* in the barracks on the left of the passage leading to the convent's second door; to the right of this passage stood an impregnable wall; at the end of the passage was an iron door that opened upon a vestibule with pillars; after this vestibule came the convent's great courtyard, with the garden on the right. The iron door was guarded by a portress.

When Giulio and his eight men were three leagues from Castro, he stopped at an out-of-the-way inn to sit out the heat of the day. Only

there did he reveal his project to the men; he then drew in the sand a map of the convent he was going to attack.

"At nine o'clock in the evening," he told his men, "we will dine outside of the town; at midnight, we enter; there we will find your five comrades, who will be waiting for us near the convent. One of them will be on horseback, and he will be playing the role of a courier just arrived from Rome to call Signora de Campireali back home, where her husband is dying. We will try to get through the first door silently, here, next to the barracks," he said, pointing to the map. "If we have to begin fighting at this first gate, the nuns' *bravi* will find it easy to shoot at us with their harquebuses either while we are still outside in the little square, here, or as we traverse the narrow passage that leads to the second door. This second door is made of iron, but I have a key.

"Now, it is true that there are huge iron arms called valets attached to the wall, and these can be swung into place to prevent the two panels of the door from opening. But these two iron bars are too heavy for the portress sister to operate, and I have never seen them in place; and I have passed through that iron gate ten times. I am counting on our passing through it again tonight with no mishaps. You understand that I have spies in the convent; my aim is to carry off a boarder and not a nun; we will not need to show our arms, except as a very last resort. If we have started fighting before getting to that second door with its iron bars, the portress will certainly call up two old gardeners, seventy-year-olds, who sleep inside the convent, and these old men will put the iron arms I described in place. If this misfortune befalls us, in order to get past that door we will have to break through the wall, which will take us ten minutes; in any case, I will be the one who goes to the door first. One of these gardeners is in my pay; but I

have been careful, as you can imagine, not to tell him about my project of abduction. Once we are through this second door, we turn to the right, which takes us into the garden; and once we are in the garden, the real war begins, so we must rush immediately on everyone we see. Make use of only your swords and daggers, of course, because any shot from a harquebus will be heard all over town, and the whole village may rise up to attack us as we leave. Not that I would have any fear of cutting my way through a puny little town like that with thirteen men like yourselves; nobody would dare to show himself in the street; but quite a few of the bourgeois own harquebuses, and they would fire on us from their windows. In that case, we would have to stick close to the walls of the houses; all of this I say only in passing. Now, once you're in the convent garden, say quietly to every person you meet: 'retire now'; and you should use your daggers to kill anyone who does not obey immediately. I will go up into the convent via the little garden door with those of you who are closest to me, and three minutes later I will return with one or two women, whom we will be carrying in our arms without letting them walk. We will then immediately leave the convent and the town. I will post two of you near the door, to fire off twenty harquebus shots, to frighten the bourgeois and keep them at a distance."

Giulio repeated the whole plan twice.

"Does everybody understand?" he asked his men. "It will be completely dark in that vestibule: the garden on the right, the courtyard on the left; no mistakes."

"Count on us!" cried the soldiers. Then they went off to drink; but the corporal stayed behind and asked permission to speak with the captain.

"Nothing simpler," he said, "than Your Lordship's plan. I have

already raided two convents in my day, and this will be my third; but we are too few. If the enemy forces us to destroy the wall supporting the hinges of the second door, you have to assume that the *bravi* in the barracks will not be idle during that long process; they will kill seven or eight of our men by gunfire, and then they will be able to get the lady away from us when we come back out. This is what happened to us in a convent near Bologna: they killed five of us, and we killed eight of them, but the captain did not get his lady. I would propose two things to Your Lordship: I know four peasants living near this inn where we are now, men who fought bravely under Sciarra, and for a sequin each they will battle all night long like lions. Now, they might make off with some silver from the convent; but that shouldn't concern you—the sin is on their consciences; you, now, you hired them only to help you get the lady, and that's all there is to it. My second proposition is this: Ugone is an educated, capable sort; he was a doctor when he killed his brother-in-law and took off for the *machia* (the forest). You could send him to the convent an hour before sundown; he could say he's looking for work, and he would manage it so well that he'd get into the guardhouse; he would get the nuns' servants drunk; and on top of that, he's quite capable of wetting the fuses of their arquebuses."

Unfortunately, Giulio consented to the corporal's ideas. As the latter was leaving, he added:

"We are about to attack a convent. That means *major excommunication*, and besides, this convent is under the direct protection of the Madonna. . . ."

"I understand!" cried Giulio as if startled by these last words. "Stay here with me." The corporal closed the door and began to say

the rosary with Giulio. Their prayer lasted a full hour. When night came, they resumed their journey.

As the bells tolled midnight, Giulio, who had entered the town of Castro alone at eleven o'clock, returned to the city gate to meet his men. He reentered the town with his eight soldiers, to whom were added three well-armed peasants; they rejoined the five soldiers already in the town, and now he found himself at the head of sixteen determined men; two were disguised as servants, wearing a loose shirt of black cloth in order to disguise their *giacco* (chain mail), and their hats had no plumes.

At half past midnight, Giulio, who had taken on the role of the courier, arrived at a gallop at the convent door, making a great deal of noise and shouting out for them to open up right away for a courier sent by the cardinal. He noted with pleasure that the soldiers who responded to him through the small window, next to the first door, were more than half drunk. As was the procedure, he gave his name to them on a slip of paper; one soldier went off to give the name to the portress, who had the key to the second door and was supposed to awaken the abbess on important occasions. Getting the official response took an endless three quarters of an hour; during that time, Giulio had difficulty keeping his troops silent: a few bourgeois were beginning timidly to open their windows, when at long last a favorable response came from the abbess. Giulio entered into the guardroom by means of a five- or six-foot ladder let down from the small window, because the convent's *bravi* did not want to give themselves the trouble to open the large door; he climbed up, followed by two of his soldiers dressed as servants. Upon hopping down into the guardroom, he exchanged a glance with Ugone; all the guards were drunk,

thanks to him. Giulio told the leader that three servants from the house of Campireali, whom he had armed like soldiers to escort him on his way, had come across some fine brandy for sale and were now asking to come in so as not to be all alone on the city square; they were unanimously invited in. Giulio, accompanied by his two men, went down the stairs that led from the guardroom to the passage.

“Try to get the big door opened,” he said to Ugone. Giulio himself came smoothly to the iron door. There, he encountered the good portress, who told him that, because it was past midnight, if he wanted to enter the convent, the abbess would be obliged to write first to the bishop, and so she politely asked him to give his written orders to a little nun who had been sent by the abbess to pick them up. To this Giulio replied that in the confusion and disorder accompanying the unforeseen agony and impending death of Signor de Campireali, he had been given only a short letter of credit from the doctor, and he was told to communicate all the details orally to the dying man’s wife or daughter, if those two ladies were still in the convent, and in any case to the signora abbess. The portress went off to deliver the message. The only person remaining at the door was the young sister sent by the abbess. Giulio, chatting and flirting with her, passed his hands over the thick iron bars of the door and, laughing the whole time, tried to open it. The sister, who was quite timid, was becoming afraid and did not take this pleasantry well; then Giulio, realizing how much time had passed, was rash enough to offer the girl a handful of sequins while entreating her to open the gate for him, saying he was too tired to keep waiting outside. Our historian says that Giulio could see that he was doing something stupid: he needed to use steel, not gold, at this point, but he did not have the heart to do so: nothing would have been easier than to seize hold of the girl, who was stand-

ing only a foot away from him on the other side of the gate. But the offer of the sequins put her in a state of alarm. She since has said that from the way Giulio spoke, she could tell he was no simple courier: "He's the lover of one of the sisters," she thought, "who has come for a rendezvous"; and she was pious. Gripped by horror, she began to pull with all her might the rope of a small bell that was out in the great courtyard, making a racket that would have awakened the dead.

"The war is on," said Giulio to his men; "guard yourselves!" He took his key and, reaching his arm through the iron gate, opened the door, to the despair of the young sister, who fell to her knees and began reciting "Ave Marias" and shouting out "Sacrilege!" For a second time, Giulio should have silenced the girl, but he did not have the courage; one of his men took hold of her and put his hand over her mouth.

At the same time, Giulio heard a gunshot in the passage behind him. Ugone had opened the great door; the remainder of the soldiers had entered noiselessly when one of the guardsmen, less drunk than the others, came over to one of the grilled windows, and in his astonishment at seeing so many men in the passage, he cursed and forbade them to go any farther. They made no response and continued walking toward the iron door, and this was exactly what the soldier in the lead did, but the one in the rear, who was one of the peasants recruited that afternoon, shot his pistol at the guardsman talking from the window, killing him. That pistol shot, in the middle of the night, along with the shouts of the drunken guardsmen when they saw their comrade fall, awoke the convent soldiers, who were all in their beds but without having tasted any of Ugone's wine. Eight or ten of the convent *bravi* leaped down into the passage half-dressed and began to attack Branciforte's soldiers.

As we have said, the noise began the moment Giulio opened the iron door. Along with his two soldiers, he swiftly entered the garden, running toward the little door leading to the boarders' staircase; but he was greeted by five or six pistol shots. His two soldiers fell, and he took a bullet in his right arm. These shots came from the men of Signora de Campireali, who were spending the night in the garden as she had ordered them to, having obtained authorization for it from the bishop. Giulio ran toward the little door, so well known to him, leading from the garden to the boarders' staircase. He tried everything to open it, but it was solidly locked shut. He looked around for his men, who did not reply; they were dying; in the deep darkness, he encountered three Campireali servants, and he defended himself against them with his dagger.

He ran back into the vestibule, toward the iron door, to call his soldiers; he found the door closed: the two great, heavy iron bars had been swung into place and padlocked by the old gardeners, who had been awakened by the bell the little sister had rung.

"I am cut off," Giulio said to himself. He said it to his men too; in vain he tried to pry open the lock with his sword: if he had succeeded, he could have pushed up one of the iron bars and opened one side of the gate. His sword broke in the padlock; at the same instant, he was wounded in the shoulder by one of the servants from the garden; he turned, his back against the iron door, and found himself attacked by several men. He defended himself with his dagger; fortunately, in the total darkness, most of their sword thrusts struck only his chain mail. He was grievously wounded in his knee; he hurled himself upon one of the men who had lunged too far forward in trying to stab him, killing the man with a dagger thrust in the face, and he was lucky enough to be able to grab hold of his sword. Now he

felt he was safe; he took his stance on the left side of the door, on the courtyard side. His men came running toward him and fired five or six pistol shots through the iron bars of the door, frightening off the servants. They could make each other out only in the flashes given off by their pistols.

“Don’t shoot toward me,” cried Giulio to his men.

“Here you are, caught like a mouse in a mousetrap,” said the corporal coolly, speaking through the iron bars. “We have three men dead. We are going to break down the door jamb on the side opposite to you; stay where you are, because they will be firing on us. So there are enemies in the garden?”

“Some damnable servants of Campireali,” said Giulio.

He was still speaking to the corporal when they were fired upon; several pistol shots were aimed at the sound of their voices and came from the part of the vestibule leading out to the garden. Giulio took cover in the portress’s lodge, which was to the left as one entered; to his great joy, he found there a tiny lamp burning in front of an image of the Madonna; he took it up with great care so as not to extinguish it; and he noticed, to his chagrin, that he was trembling. He looked down at the wound in his knee, which was giving him great pain; the blood was flowing abundantly.

Casting a glance around him, he was startled to recognize a woman who had fainted on a wooden chair: it was little Marietta, the chambermaid who was confidante to Elena. He shook her vigorously to bring her to.

“Oh, Signor Giulio,” she exclaimed in tears, “do you want to kill your friend Marietta?”

“Far from it; tell Elena that I ask her pardon for disturbing her sleep, and tell her to remember the ‘Ave Maria’ from Monte Cavi.

Here is a flower I picked from her garden in Albano; but it's a little stained with blood; wash it off before giving it to her."

Just then, he heard harquebus shots from the direction of the passage; the convent's *bravi* were attacking his men.

"Tell me where the key is to this door," he said to Marietta.

"I don't see it; but here are the keys to the padlocks on the iron bars holding the great door shut. You can get out."

Giulio took the keys and hurried out of the lodge.

"Don't bother with the wall anymore," he said to his men; "I finally have the key to the door."

There was a moment of complete silence while he tried to open a padlock with one of the little keys; he had the wrong one, and tried another; finally, he got the padlock open, but just as he was raising up the iron bar, he took another bullet in his right arm from a pistol shot fired point-blank. His arm refused to work.

"Lift up this iron valet bar," he cried to his men; but there was no need to say it. In the flashes of pistol fire, they could see the curved end of the iron bar half hanging out of the ring attached to the door. Immediately, three or four hands could be seen vigorously pushing up the bar; once it was free of the ring, they let it drop onto the floor. At that point, they could push away one side of the door; the corporal came in and spoke quietly to Giulio:

"There's no more hope; only three of four of us aren't wounded, and five are dead."

"I've lost too much blood," Giulio replied; "I feel I might pass out; tell them to carry me."

As Giulio was talking with the brave corporal, the guardsmen fired off three or four shots with their harquebuses, and the corporal fell down dead. Luckily, Ugone had heard the order Giulio had just

given, and he called by name two soldiers to lift up their captain. He had not in fact passed out, and he told them to take him to the side of the garden where the little door was. This made the soldiers curse, but they obeyed nonetheless.

“One hundred sequins to anyone who can open this door!” cried Giulio.

But it resisted the furious efforts of three men. One of the old gardeners, at a window up on the second floor, was firing down at them with a pistol, the flashes of which gave light for their work.

After their futile attempts with the door, Giulio did pass out; Ugone ordered the soldiers to carry him off as quickly as possible. As for himself, he ran into the portress’s lodge, pushing little Marietta out, ordering her in the most terrible voice to run and save herself and never to tell whom she had recognized that night. He ripped the straw out of the mattress, broke several chairs, and set fire to the room. When he saw the fire was well started, he ran as fast as his legs would carry him, right through the gunshots being fired by the convent’s *bravi*.

Only when he was some 150 feet away from the Visitation Convent did he find the captain, completely unconscious, being carried away with all speed. A few minutes outside the town, Ugone had them halt: he had only four soldiers with him; he sent two of them back to the town with the order to fire their guns every five minutes. “Try to find your wounded comrades,” he told them, “and get out of the town before sunrise; we’re going to go in the direction of Croce-Rossa. If you can start fires anywhere, do so.”

When Giulio regained consciousness, they were about three leagues outside the town, and the sun was already high up over the horizon. Ugone gave him a report: “Your troop is reduced to five

men, of whom three are wounded. Two peasants survived, and I gave them two sequins each; they've fled; I have sent the two men who aren't wounded into the nearest town to find a surgeon." The surgeon, an old man trembling all over, soon arrived riding a magnificent donkey; they had had to threaten to burn his house down to convince him to come. His fear was so great that they had to make him drink brandy just to get him ready to work; he told Giulio that his wounds were minor. "This knee wound is not dangerous," he added; "but you'll walk with a limp for the rest of your life if you don't take absolute bed rest for two or three weeks." The surgeon bandaged the wounded soldiers. Ugone signaled to Giulio; they gave the surgeon two sequins, leaving him confounded with gratitude; then, under the pretext of thanking him, they made him drink so much brandy that he fell into deep sleep. This is exactly what they wanted. They carried him over to a neighboring meadow and wrapped up four sequins in a piece of paper and put it in his pocket: that was the price of his donkey, upon which they placed Giulio and one of the soldiers, who had been wounded in the leg. They went over to an ancient ruin bordering a lake to wait out the hottest part of the day; then they marched all night long, avoiding villages, which were pretty scarce on that route, and finally, two days later at sunrise, Giulio, carried there by his men, awoke in the forest of La Faggiola, in the charcoal burner's hut that served as his headquarters.

V I

The day after the battle, the sisters of Visitation Convent found, to their horror, nine dead bodies in their garden and in the passage that

led from the exterior door to the iron-barred door; eight of their *bravi* had been wounded. There had never been such fear in the convent: of course from time to time they had heard a harquebus shot out in the outer square, but never so many gunshots within their garden, amid their buildings, and under the sisters' windows. The battle had lasted an hour and a half, and during that time, there was total disorder within the convent. If Giulio Branciforte had had any kind of understanding with any one of the sisters or the boarders, he would have succeeded: all that would have been needed was for someone to open one of the doors leading in from the garden; but instead, carried away as he was with indignation and rage over what he considered young Elena's perjury, Giulio wanted to carry her off solely using force. He felt he owed it to himself to ensure that no one could possibly tell Elena about his plan. One word, though, even one to little Marietta, would have led to success: she could have opened one of the garden doors, and even a single man appearing suddenly in the sleeping quarters of the convent would have been obeyed to the letter. At the first sound of gunfire, Elena had trembled for the safety of her beloved, and from that moment, she thought of nothing but fleeing with him.

Imagine, then, her despair when little Marietta told her about the frightful wound Giulio had received in his knee, with all the blood she had seen gushing from it. Elena detested her own cowardice and weakness: "I was weak enough to say something to my mother, and Giulio has shed blood; he could have died in that sublime assault, where his great courage was responsible for everything."

The *bravi* who had been admitted to the parlor had told the nuns, who were eager to hear everything, that they had never in their lives seen bravery comparable to that of the young man dressed as a courier,

who directed the efforts of the brigands. If all the others listened to their stories with the sharpest possible interest, imagine the extreme passion with which Elena questioned these *bravi* for details about the young leader of the brigands. Following the long narratives that she coaxed out of them and the old gardeners, fully impartial observers, she began to feel that she no longer loved her mother. There was in fact a moment of a harsh exchange of words between these two women, who had loved each other so tenderly on the day before the battle; Signora de Campireali had been shocked to find traces of blood on the flowers of a certain bouquet that Elena kept close to her at all times.

“You need to throw out those flowers with the blood on them.”

“I am the one who caused this generous blood to flow, and it was shed because I was weak enough to speak to you.”

“You still love the man who murdered your brother?”

“I love my husband, who, to my eternal unhappiness, was attacked by my brother.”

After these words, nothing more whatever was said between Signora de Campireali and her daughter for the entire three days that the signora remained at the convent.

The day after her departure, Elena succeeded in escaping, taking advantage of the confusion that had developed at the convent’s two gates on account of a great number of masons who had come into the garden and who were working on building new fortifications. Little Marietta and she were disguised as workers. But the bourgeois had erected a strict guard at the town’s gates. This presented Elena with major difficulty in getting out of the town. Eventually, the same small merchant who had got letters to her from Branciforte agreed to have her pass as his daughter and to accompany her to Albano. Once

there, Elena was able to find refuge with her old nurse, who, through Elena's earlier generosity, had been able to open up a small shop. As soon as she arrived, she wrote to Branciforte, and the nurse found, not without serious difficulties, a man who was willing to go into the forest of La Faggiola without knowing the password used by the soldiers of Colonna.

The messenger returned after three days in a state of fright; to begin with, it had been impossible to locate Branciforte, and then his endless questions about him eventually made him seem suspicious, and he had been obliged to flee.

"There is no doubt that poor Giulio is dead," Elena said to herself, "and I am the one who killed him! This was the inevitable result of my cowardly weakness; he should have been loved by a strong woman, the daughter of one of the Colonna captains." The nurse feared that Elena was going to die. She went up to the Capuchins' monastery near the pathway hewn through the rock face, that place where Fabio and his father had encountered the two lovers in the middle of the night long ago. The nurse spoke to her confessor a long time and, under the seal of the confessional, told him that young Elena de Campireali wanted to rejoin Giulio Branciforte, her husband, and that she was ready to make a donation to the church of a silver lamp, valued at one hundred Spanish piastres.

"One hundred piastres!" snorted the indignant monk. "And what will happen to our monastery if we incur the hatred of Signor de Campireali? He gave us not one hundred piastres but thousands for going to the battlefield of Ciampi and collecting the body of his son, and that's not counting all the candles."

It must be said for the honor of the monastery that two elderly monks, having learned exactly where young Elena was, came down

to Albano to see her with the intention of getting her to agree to take up lodging in her family's palazzo; they knew very well that they would be richly rewarded for this by Signora de Campireali. All Albano was talking about Elena's flight and the magnificent rewards being promised by the signora to anyone who could bring her news of her daughter. But the two monks were so touched by poor Elena's despair, thinking Giulio dead, that, far from betraying her by telling her mother where she was, they agreed to escort her to the fortress of Petrella. Elena and Marietta, as always disguised as laborers, went on foot and by night to a certain spring within the forest of La Faggiola, a league from Albano. The monks had brought their mules there, and at daybreak they were all on the road to Petrella. The monks, who were known to be under the prince's protection, were greeted with respect by the soldiers they encountered in the forest, but this was not the case with the two short men who accompanied them: the soldiers regarded them with suspicion and came up close to them and then broke out into laughter, complimenting the monks on their charming mule drivers.

"Be quiet, ungodly men, and know that everything here is being done on the orders of Prince Colonna," said the monks, turning back to their path.

But poor Elena was unfortunate; the prince was absent from Petrella, and when he returned, three days later, and granted her an audience, his tone was very severe.

"Why have you come here, signorina? What is the point of this ill-advised escapade? Your women's chatter has caused the deaths of seven men as brave as any in Italy, and for this no right-minded man will ever forgive you. In this world, you must either want something or not want it. And it is no doubt because of some new chatter that

Giulio Branciforte has been declared sacrilege and has been condemned to be disemboweled for two hours with red-hot pincers, and after that burned like a Jew, yes, Giulio, one of the best Christians I know! How could they invent such a horrible lie without the benefit of some foul chatter on your part, or how could they even know that Giulio Branciforte was in Castro on the day the convent was attacked? All my men will tell you that on that very day he was seen here, in Petrella, and on that evening I sent him on an errand to Velletri."

"But is he still alive?" young Elena cried for the tenth time, bursting into tears.

"He is dead to you," replied the prince; "you will never see him again. I advise you to return to your convent at Castro; try not to commit any further indiscretions, and I command you to leave Petrella within the hour. And above all, do not tell anyone you have seen me, or I will know how to find and punish you."

Poor Elena was devastated at having been given such a reception by the famed Prince Colonna, the man Giulio so respected and the man she loved because Giulio loved him.

But no matter what Prince Colonna might say, Elena's plan of action was not ill advised. If she had come to Petrella three days later, she would have found Giulio Branciforte there; his knee wound made it impossible for him to walk, and the prince had him transported to the large market town of Avezzano in the kingdom of Naples. At the first news of the terrible sentence of sacrilege passed on Branciforte, declaring him guilty of having violated a convent, a sentence purchased by Signor de Campireali, the prince realized that if he were to keep Branciforte under his protection, he could not count on three-quarters of his men. This was a sin against the

Madonna, whose protection every brigand counted on, protection every man thought he had some claim to. And thus, if there were some *bargello* in Rome daring enough to come to the forest of La Faggiola to try to arrest Giulio, he would be successful.

Upon his arrival in Avezzano, Giulio took the name of Fontana, and the men who took him there were discreet. Upon their return to Petrella, they announced sorrowfully that Giulio had died on the road, and from that moment every one of the prince's soldiers realized that anyone who so much as spoke that fatal name could expect to find a dagger in his heart very soon.

So it was in vain that Elena, upon her return to Albano, wrote letter after letter and spent every sequin she owned in paying messengers to carry them to Branciforte. The two elderly monks who had become her friends—because, says the Florentine chronicler, extreme beauty never relinquishes its empire, even over hearts that have become hardened by egoism and hypocrisy—the two monks, we were saying, informed the poor girl that it was futile to try to get word to Branciforte: Colonna had had him declared dead, and in any case, Giulio would never reappear in public until the prince wanted him to. Elena's nurse told her, weeping, that her mother had finally discovered her hiding place and that the strictest orders had been given for her to be removed forcibly to the Campitelli palazzo in Albano. Elena understood that once she was in that palazzo, her imprisonment would be one of boundless severity and that they would cut off absolutely all communication with the world outside, whereas at the convent at Castro, she would have, in terms of sending and receiving letters, the same privileges that all the sisters had. And even more importantly, the point that decided her was that it was in the garden of that convent that Giulio had shed his blood for her; she would be able

to see once more that wooden chair in the portress's lodge where he had sat for a moment to examine the wound to his knee; it was there that he gave Marietta that little bouquet stained with blood that she would never again be without. She would return, then, sadly, to the convent at Castro, and here they could conclude her story: such a conclusion would have been better for her, and perhaps also for the reader. For we are about to witness the long degradation of a noble and generous soul. Civilization's prudent measures and lies, which henceforth will surround her at all times, will take the place of those sincere bursts of passion and natural energy. The Roman chronicler here hazards a naive reflection: because a woman takes the trouble to give birth to a beautiful daughter, she thinks she has the talent necessary to manage her life for her, and because, at six years of age, she can reasonably say to her, "Young lady, straighten your collar," when that girl is eighteen and she is fifty, and that daughter has as much and perhaps even more intelligence than her mother, the mother, carried away by her mania for ruling, thinks she still has the right to direct her life, even to the point of employing lies in order to do so. We shall see that Vittoria Carafa, Elena's mother, by means of a series of clever ruses shrewdly combined, brought that dear daughter of hers to a cruel death after having made her miserable for twelve years, and all the sad result of that mania for ruling.

Before dying, Signor de Campireali had had the great joy of hearing the sentence passed in Rome on Branciforte condemning him to two hours of torture with red-hot irons, to be carried out in one of the public intersections, then to be burned and his ashes thrown into the Tiber. The frescoes in the Cloister of Santa Maria Novella in Florence still depict for the modern viewer the cruel ways the sacrilegious were punished.¹⁷ In general, a great many guards were required to

keep the indignant crowd from taking over from the executioners. Every man thought himself the intimate friend of the Madonna. Signor de Campireali had this sentence read out to him again just a few moments before his death, and he had rewarded the lawyer who obtained the sentence with a fine estate situated between Albano and the sea. This lawyer, indeed, was not without merit. Branciforte had been condemned to that hideous torture, but not a single witness was able to say for certain that it had been he under that disguise of courier, directing the movements of the attackers with such authority. The magnificence of the gift had all the schemers in Rome talking. There was at that time a certain *fratone* (monk) at the court, a deep and capable man, capable even of forcing the pope to award him the cardinal's hat; he was in charge of the affairs relating to Prince Colonna, and having such a fearsome client earned him a great deal of respect. When Signora de Campireali saw that her daughter had returned to Castro, this was the man she approached.

"Your Reverence will be magnificently recompensed if you are willing to help me succeed in a very simple affair, which I shall explain to you. A few days from now, the sentence condemning Giulio Branciforte to a horrible torture will be published and made official within the kingdom of Naples as well. I would ask Your Reverence to read this letter from the viceroy, who is in fact related to me, deigning to inform me of this news. In what country can Branciforte seek asylum? I will remit 15,000 piastres to the prince, entreating him to give it, either in full or in part, to Giulio Branciforte on the condition that he go and serve my lord the king of Spain in his war against the rebels in Flanders. The viceroy will give the rank of captain to Branciforte, and, so that the sentence of sacrilege, which I trust will be in force in Spain as well, does not hamper him in this career, he will

adopt the name Lizzara; that is the name of a small estate I own in the Abruzzi, which I shall find a way of having made over to him through the ruse of false sales. I believe that Your Reverence has never seen a mother treat the murderer of her son in such a manner. With 500 piastres, we could long ago have rid the earth of this odious creature; but we have not wanted to embroil ourselves with Colonna. Therefore, please point out to him that my respect for his rights is costing me between 60,000 and 80,000 piastres. I wish never again to hear anything of this Branciforte, and now I ask you to present my respects to the prince."

The *fratone* said that within three days he would be traveling to the coast of Ostia, and Signora de Campireali handed him a ring worth 1,000 piastres.

A few days later, the *fratone* reappeared in Rome and told Signora de Campireali that in fact he had not told the prince of her idea; but within a month young Branciforte would have embarked for Barcelona, where she could remit to him, via one of the bankers in that city, the sum of 50,000 piastres.

The prince saw that Giulio was causing him many difficulties; no matter how dangerous it was for him to remain in Italy, the young lover could not resolve to leave the country. In vain, the prince had him consider that Signora de Campireali might die; in vain, he promised him that no matter what happened, after three years he could come back to his native land; Giulio burst into tears, but he would not consent. The prince was obliged to come and ask him to leave as a personal favor to him; Giulio could refuse nothing to his father's friend; but before anything else, he wanted to know what Elena's commands were. The prince deigned to see to it that a long letter would be sent to her; and, even more, he gave Giulio permission

to write her from Flanders once a month. Finally, the despairing lover embarked for Barcelona. But all his letters were burned by the prince, who never wanted to see Giulio in Italy again. We have forgotten to say that, although the prince's character was far from being conceited, he did think it necessary, in order to bring the negotiation to a conclusion, to tell Giulio that it was he who thought it best to settle a small fortune of 50,000 piastres on the only son of one of the most faithful servants the house of Colonna ever had.

Poor Elena was treated like a princess at the Castro convent. The death of her father had left her with a considerable fortune, and even more immense inheritances would be hers eventually. On the occasion of her father's death, she gave three ells of black cloth to every inhabitant of Castro and its environs who wanted to wear mourning for Signor de Campireali. She was still in the first days of her formal mourning period when, from an entirely unknown hand, she was given a letter from Giulio. It would be difficult to describe the rapture with which she opened the letter, or the profound sorrow that followed upon reading it. It definitely was Giulio's writing; she examined it with the most careful attention. The letter spoke of love, but good God, what love! Signora de Campireali, a woman of considerable cleverness, had in fact composed it. Her plan was to begin a correspondence with seven or eight letters of passionate love; she looked forward to preparing the following ones, which would suggest that this love was burning itself out bit by bit.

We shall skip quickly over ten years of a miserable life. Elena believed herself entirely forgotten but nonetheless had refused, in the haughtiest manner, all the marriage proposals that came from the most distinguished young lords of Rome. But she did hesitate for a moment when people spoke to her of Ottavio Colonna, the only son

of the celebrated Fabrizio, who had treated her so harshly at Petrella. It seemed to her that if she were absolutely obliged to take a husband as protector of the estates she owned in the Roman states and in the kingdom of Naples, it would be less odious to her to take the name of the man Giulio had once loved. If she had consented to this marriage, Elena would have quickly learned the truth about Giulio Branciforte. The old prince Fabrizio often spoke with delight of the feats of superhuman bravery carried out by Colonel Lizzara (Giulio Branciforte), who, just like a hero in the old romances, sought distraction in fine deeds from his unhappy love affair, which had left him incapable of enjoying any of life's pleasures. He believed Elena had married long before; Signora de Campireali had surrounded him, too, with a web of lies.

Elena was more or less reconciled with her ever so capable mother. The latter, fervently desiring to see her daughter married, entreated her friend the old cardinal Santi Quattro,¹⁸ protector of the Visitation, who was going to Castro, to tell the most elderly sisters there in confidence that his trip had been delayed by an act of mercy. The good pope Gregory XIII had been moved to pity for the soul of a brigand named Giulio Branciforte, who had once tried to violate their convent; upon hearing of the brigand's death, the pope revoked the sentence declaring him a sacrilege, knowing perfectly well that under the weight of that sentence, he could never get out of purgatory—if in fact Branciforte, who had been ambushed and massacred in Mexico by rebellious natives, had been lucky enough to make it as far as purgatory. This piece of news had everyone in the Castro convent talking; it reached Elena, who gave herself over to all those follies and vanities that a person in possession of a great fortune can turn to when deeply distressed. From this moment on, she did not come out

of her room. The reader needs to know that in order to locate her room in the same spot as the portress's lodge, the place where Giulio had taken refuge the night of the battle, she had had half the convent reconstructed. By taking infinite pains, and at the cost of a scandal that was difficult to repress, she managed to discover and to hire as domestics the three *bravi* whom Branciforte had employed, three out of the five who had escaped the battle of Castro. Among them was Ugone, an old man now and crippled by his wounds. The sight of these three men caused a great deal of murmuring; but eventually, the fear that Elena's haughty character inspired in the whole convent had carried the day, and every day the three men could be seen, dressed in her livery, coming to get their daily orders at the exterior window, and often responding at length to her many questions, always on the same subject.

After living those six months in seclusion, detached from the things of this world, that followed the news of Giulio's death, the first sensation that managed to awaken that heart so broken by a misery without remedy was a sensation of vanity.

Recently, the abbess had died. According to tradition, Cardinal Santi Quattro, still the official protector of the convent despite his ninety-two years of age, had drawn up a list of three sisters from whom the pope would select an abbess. For His Holiness even to consider the second and third names, it would have taken some very grave concern about the first name; ordinarily, those second and third names were crossed off with the stroke of a pen, and the nomination was done.

One day, Elena was at the window of what was formerly the portress's lodge and which was now the edge of one of the new wings constructed according to her orders. This window was situated not

two feet above the passage that had been soaked in the blood of Giulio and that now was a part of the garden. Elena's eyes were fixed on the ground. The three women who everyone had recently learned were on the cardinal's list to succeed the abbess came and passed in front of Elena's window. She did not see them and, as a result, was unable to greet them. One of the three was offended by this and said to the others in a voice loud enough to be overheard:

"Now, that's a fine thing, for a mere boarder to spread her rooms out in the public view like that!"

Roused from her reverie by this, Elena lifted her gaze and beheld three unpleasant stares. "Well!" she exclaimed to herself, closing the window without greeting them, "perhaps I've been a lamb in this convent too long and it's time I became a wolf, if only to provide a little variety for the town's amusements."

One hour later, one of her men, sent off as a courier, carried the following letter to her mother, who for ten years now had been living in Rome, where she had become a person of great influence:

My Most Respected Mother,

Every year you give me 300,000 francs on my birthday; I spend this money on extravagances—honorable things, true, but extravagant nonetheless. Although you have not spoken of it for a long time now, I know there are two ways I could prove my gratitude for all the good intentions you have had regarding me over the years. I will not marry, but I would with pleasure become the abbess of this convent; what has given me this idea is that the three women our cardinal Santi Quattro has put on his list to present to the Holy Father are my enemies; and no matter which of them is chosen, I can expect all sorts of vexations. Present my birthday greetings to people who might have

influence; and let us delay the election for six months, which will drive the prioress, who is the temporary leader of the convent and my intimate friend, mad with happiness. It will be a source of happiness for me, too, and it is a rare thing that such a word can be used in speaking of your daughter. I think this is a mad idea; but if you think there is any chance of success, in a few days I will take the white veil;¹⁹ eight years of residence here without spending a single night elsewhere should entitle me to a six months' exemption. Such a dispensation is never refused, and costs only forty ecus.

I am, my venerable mother, with respect, etc.

This letter gave the greatest joy to Signora de Campireali. Before she received it, she was bitterly repenting having told her daughter that Branciforte was dead; she did not know how that deep melancholy of hers would end; she feared some extreme reaction, even feared that her daughter would travel to Mexico to see the place where he had been massacred, in which case it was entirely possible that in Madrid she would learn the truth and hear the name Colonel Lizzara. But now, what her daughter was requesting through the courier was the most difficult, and maybe even the most absurd, thing in the world. A young woman who had never been religious and who was best known for her mad passion for a brigand—a love that might even have been consummated—for such a person to be put at the head of a convent where every Roman prince had a relative! “But,” thought Signora de Campireali, “they say that every case can be pleaded, and if it can be pleaded, it can be won.” In her reply, Vittoria Carafa gave some hope to her daughter, who, in general, had always wanted the silliest things but, as a kind of compensation, also soon grew bored

with them. That evening, as she sought out any kind of information having anything to do with the Castro convent, she learned that for several months now, her friend Cardinal Santi Quattro had been greatly upset: he wanted to marry his niece to Don Ottavio Colonna, the eldest son of Prince Fabrizio, of whom so much has been said in the present history. The prince had offered him his second son, Don Lorenzo, because in order to fortify his own holdings, which had been strangely compromised of late because of the reconciliation of the pope with the king of Naples, who were now jointly warring against the brigands of La Faggiola, the wife of his eldest son would have to bring with her a dowry of 600,000 piastres (that is, 3,210,000 francs) to the house of Colonna. But Cardinal Santi Quattro, even by means of disinheriting all his other relations in the most extreme way, could offer a fortune of only 380,000 or 400,000 ecus.

Vittoria Carafa spent that evening and part of the night confirming all these facts from friends of old Santi Quattro. The next morning at seven o'clock, she had herself announced at the old cardinal's house.

"Your Eminence," she said, "we are both quite old; it is futile to try to deceive us by giving pretty names to things that are not especially pretty; I have come to make a wild proposition to you: the best I can say about it is that it is not odious; but I admit that even I find it supremely ridiculous. When there were discussions of marriage between Don Ottavio Colonna and my daughter, I took a liking to that young man, and on the day of his marriage, I would like to give you 200,000 piastres in land or in money, which I beg you to pass on to him. But for a poor widow like me to make such an enormous sacrifice, it will be necessary for my daughter Elena, who is twenty-seven

years old and has not left the convent since she was nineteen, to be made abbess of Castro; and for that to happen, the election must be delayed by six months; the thing is quite canonical."

"What are you saying, signora?" exclaimed the old cardinal, beside himself. "His Holiness would never do what you are asking of me, an old, powerless man."

"And this is why I told Your Eminence that the thing was ridiculous: fools will find it a mad thing; but wiser heads, those who are informed of matters at court, will know that our excellent prince the good pope Gregory XIII very much wants to recompense the long and loyal service of Your Eminence by facilitating this marriage, which all Rome would like to see. And after all, the thing is possible, it is canonical, and I can prove it; my daughter is taking the white veil tomorrow."

"But the simony, signora!" cried the old man in a terrible voice. Signora de Campireali got up to leave.

"What is that paper you're leaving there?"

"This is the list of estates that I would present as being worth 200,000 piastres, if one preferred estates to simple money; the change of ownership for these estates could be kept secret for a long while; for example, the house of Colonna could sue me for something, and I could lose. . . .

"But the simony, signora! The frightful simony!"

"The first thing to do is to defer the election for six months; tomorrow I will return to hear Your Eminence's wishes."

I sense that readers born north of the Alps might need some explanation for the almost official tone of several passages in this dialogue; I would remind them that, in most of the strictly Catholic countries, most conversations on awkward or scabrous topics ulti-

mately end in the confessional, and at that point, the question of whether one has used a respectful term or an ironic one is not a trivial matter.

In the course of the following day, Vittoria Carafa learned that, because of some serious factual error that was discovered in the list of the three women presented for the place of abbess of Castro, the election would be postponed for six months: the second woman on the list had a renegade in her family; one of her great-uncles had converted to Protestantism at Udine.

Signora de Campireali thought she ought to approach Prince Fabrizio Colonna, to whose house she was going to be offering such a dramatic augmentation of fortune. After two days of attempts, she succeeded in obtaining an interview with him in a village near Rome, but she came away from the audience quite unsettled; she had found the prince, normally such a calm man, so preoccupied with the military glory of Colonel Lizzara (Giulio Branciforte) that she decided it would be pointless to ask for his secrecy on that matter. The colonel was like a son to him, or even better, like a favorite disciple. The prince spent his day reading and rereading certain letters from Flanders. What would happen to Signora de Campireali's pet scheme, the one to which she had devoted so much time and sacrificed so much over the last ten years, if her daughter were to learn about the glory of this Colonel Lizzara!

I believe I should pass over in silence a great many details that would in fact help depict accurately the mores of this era, but they are too saddening to go into. The author of the Roman manuscript has taken infinite pains to ascertain the exact dates of all these details that I am suppressing.

Two years after the interview between Signora de Campireali and

Prince Colonna, Elena was abbess of Castro; but the old cardinal Santi Quattro was dead of remorse following this great act of simony. At that time, Castro had as its bishop one of the finest men of the papal court, Monsignor Francesco Cittadini, a nobleman from the city of Milan. This young man, notable for both his modest grace and his dignified tone, had many meetings with the abbess of Visitation, especially regarding the new cloister with which she was embellishing the convent. This young bishop Cittadini, then twenty-nine years old, fell madly in love with the beautiful abbess. At the trial that took place a year later, a great crowd of nuns were deposed as witnesses, all reporting that the bishop made as many trips to the convent as he possibly could, often saying to their abbess: "Elsewhere, I give the commands, and I must confess to my shame that doing so gives me pleasure; but with you, I obey like a slave but with a pleasure that far outweighs that of commanding elsewhere. I feel I am under the influence of a superior being; no matter how much I try, I can have no will other than yours, and I would far rather see myself the least of your slaves for all eternity than to be king somewhere out of the sight of those eyes."

The witnesses report that in the middle of these elegant phrases, the abbess would often order him to be silent, and in harsh terms, terms that seemed to show contempt. One witness continued, "To tell the truth, the signora treated him like a servant; and when she did, the poor bishop lowered his eyes and began to weep, but he never left." Every day he would find some new pretext for coming to the convent, which was a great scandal to the nuns' confessors and to the enemies of the abbess. But the signora abbess was vigorously defended by the prioress, her good friend, who was in charge of the convent's internal government under the orders of the abbess.

“My noble sisters,” the latter said, “you know that ever since that unhappy passion that our abbess felt in the early years of her youth for a soldier of fortune, she has had many bizarre ideas; but you also know that her character is marked by one important thing, that she never changes her mind regarding people for whom she once had contempt. Now, in her whole life perhaps, she has never spoken such audacious things as she has done, in our presence, in addressing Monsignor Cittadini. Every day, we have seen him submit to the kind of treatment that makes us blush for his dignity.”

“Yes,” replied the scandalized sisters, “but he came back every day; therefore, he couldn’t really have been all that mistreated, and in any case this intrigue is damaging to the reputation of the holy order of the Visitation.”

The harshest master would not heap as many insults on the most inept valet as the haughty abbess heaped every day upon the young bishop with the unctuous manners; but he was in love, and he had brought with him from his own country this maxim, that once one has begun an enterprise like this, one must focus strictly on the goal and not think too much about the means.

“When all is said and done,” said the young bishop to his confidant Cesare del Bene, “the one who really deserves contempt is the lover who abandons the attack before being forced to do so by superior powers.”

And now it is my sad task to confine myself to giving what must necessarily be a dry account of the trial that resulted in Elena’s death. The proceedings of this trial, which I read about in a library whose name I must not mention, occupy no less than eight folio volumes.²⁰ The interrogations and the arguments are in the Latin language, the responses in Italian. I read there that during the month of November

1572, at eleven o'clock in the evening, the young bishop came alone to the door of the church, which, during the day, admits the faithful; the abbess herself opened this door and allowed him to follow her. She received him in a room that she often occupied and that had a secret door leading to the galleries over the aisles in the nave. Scarcely an hour later, the bishop, seeming nonplussed, was sent back to his home; the abbess herself escorted him to the church door and said these exact words to him:

“Return to your palazzo and leave me at once. Farewell, signor; you horrify me; I feel as if I have given myself to a lackey.”

But then, three months later, came the time of Carnival. The people of Castro were renowned for the festivities they put on at Carnival time; the whole town resounded to the racket that the masquerades made. Everyone passed by a little window that let light into a certain stable of the convent. Everybody knew that three months before Carnival, this stable had been converted into a salon, and it was never empty during the days of masquerade. At one point in the midst of all the public rowdiness, the bishop appeared in his coach; the abbess signaled to him, and the following night, at one in the morning, he did not fail to appear in front of the church door. He entered, but less than three-quarters of an hour later, he was angrily sent away. Since the first rendezvous, in the month of November, he had continued to come to the convent every week. His face wore a certain expression of stupidly happy triumph, which everyone noticed but which seemed to be a great shock to the haughty character of the young abbess. On Easter Sunday, as on other days, she treated him like the lowest of men, and she said things to him that the poorest of the convent paupers would not have tolerated. But all the same, a few days

later she signaled to him, and the fine bishop made a point of turning up outside the church door at midnight; she had had him come in order to inform him that she was pregnant. Upon hearing this news, the trial records say, the fine young man went pale with horror and became completely stupid with fear. The abbess had a fever; she had a doctor summoned and made no secret of her state to him. This doctor was acquainted with his patient's generous character, and he promised to extricate her from the situation. He started by putting her in touch with a young, pretty peasant woman, who was not technically a midwife but had all the talents of one. Her husband was a baker. Elena enjoyed conversing with this woman, who told her that in order to carry out the scheme by which they hoped to save her, she would need to have two trusted women inside the convent.

"A woman like you, certainly, but one of my equals? Never. Leave me."

The midwife departed. But some hours later, Elena, realizing it would not be wise to let this woman go about talking, called back the doctor, who brought her back to the convent, where she was treated generously. The woman swore that even if she had not been called back, she would never have divulged the secret; but she also declared a second time that if there were not two women in the convent devoted to the abbess and aware of the whole situation, she would not consent to be part of it. (She was no doubt concerned about accusations of infanticide.) After a great deal of reflection, the abbess resolved to confide her terrible secret to Signora Vittoria, the prioress, from the noble family of de C***, and to Signora Bernarda, daughter of the Marchese of P***. She made them both swear on their breviaries never to say a word, even in the confessional, of what she was about to tell them. Both ladies were frozen with fear. In their interrogations,

they admitted that, given the arrogant character of their abbess, they expected to hear that she had murdered someone. But the abbess spoke simply and coldly:

“I have failed in my duties, and I am pregnant.”

Signora Vittoria, the prioress, deeply moved and troubled by her years of friendship with Elena and not impelled by vain curiosity, cried out, tears in her eyes:

“Who is the wretch who has committed such a crime?”

“I have not told even my confessor, so you may gather whether I want to tell you!”

The two ladies immediately deliberated as to how this fatal secret could be kept from the rest of the convent. They decided first that the abbess’s bed should be carried from her own room, which was too central a location, to the pharmacy that had recently been established in the most remote area of the convent, up on the third floor of the great building that had been built through the generosity of Elena. It was here that the abbess was delivered of a baby boy. For three weeks, the baker’s wife had been hidden in the prioress’s rooms. Once, when this woman was walking quickly through the cloister corridor carrying the infant, it began to cry, and, in a state of terror, the woman took refuge in the cellar. One hour later, Signora Bernarda, along with the doctor, managed to open a small door to the garden, and the baker’s wife swiftly exited the convent and, soon after that, the town. Reaching the open countryside, and still in a state of panic and terror, she hid herself in a grotto that she by chance discovered among some rocks. The abbess wrote to Cesare del Bene, the confidant and chief valet to the bishop, who hurried to the grotto he had been told of; he was on horseback: he took the infant in his arms and left at a gallop for Montefiascone. The baby was baptized in the church of Santa

Margherita and given the name Alexander. The hostess of the inn there procured a wet nurse, to whom Cesare gave eight ecus: many women assembled at the church during the baptism ceremony cried out to Signor Cesare loudly, demanding the name of the child's father.

"He is a great Roman lord," he said to them, "who has let himself take advantage of a poor village girl like one of you." And with that, he disappeared.

V I I

Everything was going well in that huge convent, inhabited by more than three hundred curious women; no one had seen anything, and no one had heard anything. But the abbess had paid the doctor with several handfuls of sequins that had been newly minted in Rome. The doctor gave several of those coins to the baker's wife. This woman was pretty, and her husband jealous; he rummaged around in her trunk, discovered those shiny pieces of gold, and, believing them to have been the price of his own dishonor, forced her, his knife at her throat, to tell him where they came from. After trying some evasive answers, she told him the truth, and the two made peace. The couple went on to discuss what to do with such a large sum. The baker's wife wanted to pay off some debts; but the husband thought it a better idea to purchase a mule, which is what they did. The mule caused a lot of talk in their neighborhood, as everyone knew how poor they were. All the town gossips, both friends and enemies, came along in succession asking the baker's wife who her generous lover was who had made it so they could buy a mule. The woman, irritated

at this, replied in various ways, sometimes telling the truth. One day, when Cesare del Bene had gone to see the infant and returned to make a report to the abbess, the latter, though very unwell at the moment, dragged herself over to the grilled window and heaped him with reproaches over the indiscretions of the men he employed. For his part, the bishop was so frightened that he fell ill; he wrote to his brothers in Milan to tell them about the unjust accusations being leveled against him; he called upon them to come to his aid. Though seriously ill, he resolved to leave Castro; but before leaving, he wrote to the abbess:

You know by this time that everything is now a matter of public knowledge. So if you have any interest in saving not just my reputation but perhaps even my life, and in order to avoid an even greater scandal, you could lay the blame on Gian Battista Doleri, who died a few days ago; and if by this means you do not save your own honor, you will at least have kept me from serious danger.

The bishop called Don Luigi, the confessor for the Monastery of Castro.

"Deliver this," he told him, "directly into the hands of the abbess herself."

She, upon reading that foul letter, cried out in front of all those who happened to be in her chamber at the time:

"And so it is that the foolish virgins deserve to be treated, for preferring the beauty of the body to that of the soul!"²¹

Rumors of what was going on at Castro quickly reached the ear of the *terrible* cardinal Farnese (he had given himself that epithet several years back, because he hoped, at the next conclave, to have the support of the "zealot" cardinals). He immediately ordered the *podesta*

of Castro to arrest Bishop Cittadini. All the bishop's servants, fearing being put to the question, took flight.²² Only Cesare del Bene remained faithful to his master, swearing to him that he would die from torture rather than reveal anything that could harm him. Cittadini, seeing himself surrounded by guards in his palazzo, wrote again to his brothers, who arrived from Milan in great haste. They found he was being held in the prison of Ronciglione.

I read in the first interrogation of the abbess that although she fully admitted her own sin, she denied having any relationship with the bishop; her accomplice was Gian Battista Doleri, the convent's lawyer.

On September 9, 1573, Pope Gregory XIII ordered the trial to be undertaken with the greatest of urgency and the greatest of rigor. A criminal judge, a *fiscal*, and a commissioner came from Rome to Castro and Ronciglione. Cesare del Bene, chief valet to the bishop, would admit only that he had brought a baby to a wet nurse. They interrogated him in the presence of the two women Vittoria and Bernarda, putting him under torture two days in a row; he suffered horribly; but, true to his word, he admitted only to facts that were impossible to deny, and the *fiscal* could get nothing out of him.

When it was the turn of the sisters Vittoria and Bernarda, who had witnessed the tortures inflicted upon Cesare, they admitted everything immediately. All the nuns were interrogated about the criminal, the man who fathered the child; most of them said that they had heard it was monsignor the bishop. One of the portresses reported the outrageous language she had heard the abbess using with the bishop while turning him out of the church door. She added: "When people talk like that to each other, you can tell they've been making love together for a long time. And in fact monsignor the

bishop, who usually had a striking air of self-assurance, now looked sheepish when he left the church."

One of the sisters, interrogated in view of the torture instruments, said that the criminal must be the cat, because the abbess always held him in her arms and was always caressing him. Another nun claimed that the criminal must be the wind, because on windy days the abbess seemed happy and in a good mood; she exposed herself to the wind in a belvedere that she had had constructed for that very purpose; and whenever one went to her there to ask for some favor, she would never refuse. The baker's wife, the nurse, and all the gossips from Montefiascone, frightened by the tortures inflicted on Cesare, told the truth.

The young bishop was sick, or pretended to be sick, at Ronciglione, which gave his brothers (who were supported by the credit and the means of influence of Signora de Campireali) time to throw themselves repeatedly at the feet of the pope and ask him to suspend the trial until the bishop had recovered his health. Upon which the terrible Cardinal Farnese increased the number of soldiers guarding him in the prison. The bishop being unavailable for interrogation, the commissioners began every session by making the abbess submit to a new questioning. One day, when her mother had told her to be brave and continue to deny everything, she admitted everything.

"Why did you inculcate Gian Battista Doleri at first?"

"Out of pity for the bishop and his cowardice; and beyond that, I thought that if his life could be saved, he could help ensure that my son would be cared for."

After this avowal, the abbess was locked up in a room in the convent of Castro with walls and a ceiling both eight feet thick; the nuns never spoke of this chamber, which was called the monks' room,

with anything but terror in their voices; three women were stationed there to keep watch over the abbess.

The health of the bishop having improved somewhat, three hundred *shirri*, or soldiers, were sent to take him from Ronciglione, and he was transported to Rome on a litter; he was put in the prison called Corte Savella. A few days later, the nuns were also brought to Rome; the abbess was put in the Monastery of Santa Marta. Four nuns stood accused: Sisters Vittoria and Bernarda, the *tourière* sister,²³ and the portress, who had heard the outrageous words the abbess used to the bishop.

The bishop was interrogated by the auditor of the chamber, one of the highest-ranking personages in the judiciary. Poor Cesare del Bene was put to torture again, but he not only refused to admit anything but actually said some things that “caused the public ministry some embarrassment”; and this earned him another torture session. Preliminary torture was also inflicted upon the sisters Vittoria and Bernarda. The bishop stupidly denied everything, but with a fine stubbornness; he reported in very great detail everything he had done during the three evenings that he had in fact spent alone together with the abbess.

Finally, the bishop and the abbess were confronted with each other; and even though she continued to admit the truth, she was tortured. Because she repeated what she had been saying ever since her first avowal, the bishop, staying faithful to his assumed role, hurled insults at her.

After many more measures undertaken—reasonable in themselves, perhaps, but tarnished by that spirit of cruelty which prevailed all too often with the tribunals of Italy in the era following the reigns

of Charles V and Philip II—the bishop was condemned to life imprisonment in the Castel Sant’Angelo; the abbess was condemned to be locked up for the rest of her life in that Convent of Santa Marta where she was currently held. But already, Signora de Campireali was at work plotting a way to save her daughter by means of having a subterranean passage dug. This passage began in one of the sewers that were built during the era of ancient Rome’s magnificence, and was planned to terminate by opening up into the deep cellar where the mortal remains of Santa Marta’s deceased nuns were deposited. The passage was about two feet wide and was walled with wooden planks to hold back the earth on the left and the right; as the diggers advanced, for a roof, two boards were placed as joists in the figure of a capital *A*.

They dug the tunnel about thirty feet below the ground. The important point was to ensure it went in exactly the right direction; they kept encountering old wells and the foundations of ancient houses, which forced the workers to make turns constantly. The other great problem was what to do with the excavated dirt; it would appear that they distributed it at night all over the streets of Rome. People were surprised to see all this dirt that had fallen, so to speak, from the sky overnight.

No matter how much Signora de Campireali spent on the project to try to save her daughter, the subterranean passage would surely have been discovered, but Pope Gregory XIII died in 1585 and, while the throne was vacant, disorder reigned.

Elena was miserable in Santa Marta; the reader may imagine how nuns who were both simple and poor might put some zeal into tormenting so wealthy an abbess convicted of such a crime. Elena impatiently awaited the results of her mother’s scheme. But suddenly, her

heart underwent some strange emotions. Six months had already passed since Fabrizio Colonna, seeing the state of health that Gregory XIII was in and having great plans of his own for the period between popes, had sent one of his officers to Giulio Branciforte, now well known among the Spanish armies under the name of Colonel Liz-zara. He called him back to Italy; Giulio was burning to see his native land again. Under an assumed name, he came ashore at Pascara, a little port town on the Adriatic near Chieti, in the Abruzzi, and from there he went by the mountain route to Petrella. The joy of the prince astonished everyone. He told Giulio that he had recalled him in order to make him his successor and to give him the command of his soldiers. To this Giulio replied that, from a military point of view, that command wasn't worth much of anything, which he could easily prove: if the Spanish ever seriously wanted their territory, they could destroy every soldier of fortune in Italy, and without much trouble or expense.

"But that being said," added young Branciforte, "if you want it so, my prince, I am ready to march. You will always find in me the successor to the brave Ranuccio, killed at Ciampi."

Before Giulio's arrival, the prince had ordered—as only he knew how to order—that no one in Petrella talk to Giulio about Castro and the trial of the abbe: the slightest reference would result in a death sentence with no possibility of remission. Amid the raptures of friendship with which he greeted Branciforte, he asked him not to go to Albano under any circumstances except in his company, and his manner of arranging this trip was to have the town occupied by a thousand of his men and to station twelve hundred more on the road to Rome. Giulio's state may be imagined when the prince, who had summoned old Scotti, still alive, up to the house where he had set up

his headquarters, had him enter the room where he was sitting with Branciforte. As the two old friends rushed to embrace each other:

“Now, my poor colonel,” he said to Giulio, “ready yourself for the worst.”

And with that, he snuffed out the candle and left, turning the key on the two friends.

The next day, Giulio, who did not want to leave his room, sent to ask the prince for permission to return to Petrella and not to see him for a few days. But the messenger returned to tell him the prince had disappeared, along with his troops. During the night, he had learned of the death of Gregory XIII; he completely forgot his friend Giulio and was out in the countryside. All that remained were thirty men who belonged to Ranuccio’s old company. The reader should know that in those days, while the papal throne was vacant, laws were suspended and mute and everyone sought to satisfy his passions, as the only power now was power itself; this was why, before the day’s end, Prince Colonna had hanged more than fifty of his enemies. As for Giulio, though he had only forty men with him, he dared to turn and march on Rome.

All the servants of the abbess of Castro had remained faithful to her; they were lodged in shoddy houses next to the Convent of Santa Marta. The death throes of Gregory XIII had lasted more than a week; Signora de Campireali waited patiently for the troubled days that would follow his death so as to finish the remaining fifty feet of her underground passage. It had to pass beneath the cellars of a number of inhabited houses, so she was very much afraid of being unable to keep her project from becoming public knowledge.

Two days after Branciforte’s arrival at Petrella, the three former *bravi* of Giulio’s, the ones Elena had taken into her service, seemed to

have gone mad. Though everyone knew only too well that she was being kept in total isolation and guarded zealously by three nuns who detested her, Ugone, one of the three *bravi*, came to the convent door insisting in the strangest way that he had to see his mistress and had to see her immediately. He was rejected and thrown out the door. In his desperation, the man remained right there and began handing out a bajoc (that is, a sou) to everyone attached in any way to the convent and who came out or went in, saying to them these exact words: "Rejoice with me; Signor Giulio Branciforte has returned; he is alive: tell it to all your friends."

The two comrades of Ugone spent the day ferrying bajocs to him, and they all continued to distribute them day and night, always using those same words, until they had not a single coin left. But the three *bravi* nonetheless continued to stand guard at the door to the Convent of Santa Marta, relieving each other in turn, always addressing every passerby with the same words, followed by a low bow: "Signor Giulio has returned," etc.

The idea of the three brave men worked: less than thirty-six hours after the first bajoc had been distributed, poor Elena, in isolation in the depths of her cell, knew that *Giulio was alive*; the phrase threw her into a kind of frenzy: "Oh, my mother, what harm you have done me!" A few hours later, the startling news was confirmed by little Marietta, who, sacrificing every gold ornament she owned, obtained permission to follow the *tourière* sister, who delivered meals to the prisoner. Elena flung herself into her arms, weeping with joy.

"This is so beautiful," she said to her, "but I shall not be with you much longer."

"Of course!" replied Marietta. "I am sure that the papal conclave will commute your sentence to simple exile."

“Oh, my dear friend! To see Giulio, to see him again! And to see him, guilty as I am!”

In the middle of the third night after this exchange, part of the church floor collapsed with a tremendous crash; the nuns of Santa Marta believed the whole convent was going to fall down. The uproar was extreme, with people crying out about an earthquake. And one hour after the collapse of the marble floor in the church, Signora de Campireali, preceded by Elena’s three *bravi*, penetrated into the cell by the underground passage.

The three *bravi* cried out, “Victory! Victory, signora!”

Elena was in mortal terror; she feared that Giulio Branciforte would be with them. She was fully reassured, and her face took on again its severe expression when they explained that they had only Signora de Campireali with them and that Giulio was still in Albano, which he had just occupied with thousands of soldiers.

After a few moments of waiting, Signora de Campireali appeared; she walked with great difficulty, leaning on the arm of her servant, who was dressed in a grand costume, with a sword at his side; but his magnificent suit of clothes was all soiled from the dirt of the tunnel.

“Oh my dear Elena, I’ve come to rescue you!” cried Signora de Campireali.

“And who told you that I wanted to be rescued?”

Signora de Campireali stood there stunned; she gazed at her daughter wide-eyed; she seemed highly agitated.

“Well, my dear Elena!” she said at last. “Fate forces me to admit to having done something quite natural, perhaps, after all the misfortune that befell our family, but I repent of it now, and I beg you to forgive me: Giulio . . . Branciforte . . . is alive. . . .”

"And because he is alive, I do not want to live."

Signora de Campireali at first could not understand what her daughter was saying, and she went on to beg her in the tenderest terms; but she received no response: Elena turned toward her crucifix and began to pray without listening to her. Signora de Campireali tried in vain for an hour to get her to say one word or even to look at her. Finally, her daughter, growing impatient, said to her:

"His letters were hidden beneath the marble of this same crucifix back in my little bedroom in Albano; it would have been better if you had let my father stab me to death! Go away—and leave some gold here for me."

Signora de Campireali wanted to stay and continue talking with her daughter despite the frightened signals her servant was making to her, but Elena had no more patience:

"Leave me at least one hour of freedom; you have poisoned my life, and now you want to poison my death."

"This underground passage will be safe for another two or three hours; I dare to hope that you'll change your mind," cried the signora as she burst into tears. She turned and followed the passage back.

"Ugone, stay with me," said Elena to one of her *bravi*, "and have your arms ready, because you may need to defend me. Let me see your dagger, your sword, and your poniard!"

The old soldier laid out his weapons, all in good condition.

"Very well! Stand outside my prison; I want to write a long letter to Giulio, which you shall deliver yourself; I don't want it to pass through anyone else's hands but yours, as I have no way of sealing it. You may read everything I write. Put all this gold my mother left into your pockets; I need only fifty sequins; put that on my bed."

After saying this, Elena began to write.

I have no doubt of you, my dear Giulio; if I am leaving, it is because I would die of sorrow in your arms, realizing there what my happiness might have been like if I had not committed the sin that I did. Never believe that I have ever loved anyone in the world after you; far from it: my heart was filled with contempt for the man I admitted into my chamber. My sin was born strictly out of ennui or, if you like, of libertinism. Picture to yourself my spirit, so enfeebled after that futile attempt I made at Petrella where that prince I venerated because you love him treated me so cruelly—picture, I beg you, how worn down my spirit was after twelve years of lies. Everything surrounding me was false, a lie, and I knew it. I received, at first, thirty letters from you; imagine the transport with which I opened the first ones! But in reading them, my heart froze over. I studied the handwriting, and I recognized it was yours, but I did not recognize your heart. Picture how this first lie so overwhelmed the very essence of my life as to make me have no pleasure in a letter written in your hand! That detestable announcement of your death killed off in me everything that remained of the happiness of our youth. My first idea, as you will perfectly understand, was to go to Mexico and touch with my own hands the shore on which they told me the savages had massacred you; and if I had followed through with that idea . . . we would be happy right now, because at Madrid, no matter how numerous and how adept the spies were that a wary hand had set upon me, because I would have worked to appeal to every heart in which a little pity and goodness still lived, it is probable that I would have learned the truth; because already, my dear Giulio, your heroic acts had drawn the attention of everyone to you, and there may have been someone in Madrid who knew that you were Branciforte. Do you want to know what it was that kept happiness away from us? It was, first, the mem-

ory of that atrocious, humiliating reception the prince gave me at Petrella; how many enormous obstacles between Castro and Mexico! You see, my soul had already been drained of its resources. Then, a thought born out of vanity came to me. I had had great buildings constructed at the convent in order to be able to have my room occupy the same place as the portress's lodge where you took refuge that night of battle. One day, I was staring down at that spot of earth where you had shed blood for me; I heard someone say something contemptuous, I raised my head, I saw three wicked faces; to avenge myself, I decided I would be abbess. My mother, who knew very well that you were still alive, managed heroic feats to get me that outrageous nomination. The position itself meant nothing to me except annoyances; it eventually rotted away my spirit; I found pleasure simply in showing my power by making others miserable; I committed injustices. I saw myself, at thirty years of age, virtuous in the eyes of the world, rich, respected, and for all that, perfectly wretched. Then came along that poor man who was goodness itself but also the embodiment of absurdity. His absurdity led me to accept his propositions. My heart was so miserable over all that had surrounded me since your departure that it did not have the strength to resist the smallest temptation. May I admit to you something a little indecent—but I forget, everything is permitted for a dead woman. When you read these lines, worms will be devouring those supposed beauties that should have been yours alone. But I must say something that it pains me to say; I could not see why I should not try that more gross style of love that all the Roman ladies indulge in; I had a libertine temptation, but even so I was never able to give myself to that man without a feeling of horror and disgust that obliterated all pleasure. I could see you always at my side, in the garden of our palazzo in Albano, when the

Madonna inspired you with that thought, apparently so generous but which in fact, after my mother, has been the one thing that has made our lives misery. You were never threatening, but tender and good as you always were; you looked at me; and then I felt such moments of rage at that other man that I went so far as to beat him with all my strength. There it is, the whole truth, my dear Giulio; I did not want to die without telling it all to you, and I thought also that perhaps having this conversation with you would take the idea of dying away from me. But now I can see only how much better seeing you again would have been if I had maintained myself so as to be worthy of you. Now I command you to live, and to continue with that military career which has given me such joy when I learned of your triumphs. Great God, what joy I would have felt if I had received your letters, especially after the battle of Achenne! Live, and always keep in your memory Ranuccio, killed at Ciampi, as well as Elena, who, to avoid seeing reproach in your eyes, is dead at Santa Marta.

After finishing her letter, Elena went over to the old soldier, whom she found asleep; she slipped his dagger away from him without his being aware of it, and then she awakened him.

"I have finished," she said to him; "I am worried that our enemies might take over the underground passage. Hurry, and take my letter from the table there, and be sure to give it to Giulio *yourself*, do you understand me? And also, give him my handkerchief, here; tell him that I love him no more right now than I have always loved him, *always*, you hear me?"

Ugone stood up but did not leave.

"Go! Go!"

“Signora, have you truly thought it through? Signor Giulio loves you so much!”

“Yes, me, too, I love him, too; take the letter and give it to him yourself.”

“Well then! May God bless you for a good woman!”

Ugone left, but then he quickly turned around and returned; he found Elena dead; the dagger was in her heart.

THE JEW

To the Curious,

Having nothing to read, I shall write. It is the same kind of pleasure, but the intensity is greater.—The stove is giving me a great deal of trouble. My feet are cold, and my head aches.

—Trieste, January 14–15, 1831

“I was a much better looking man in those days. . . .”

“‘But you still look remarkably good.’

“Oh, but what a difference! I am forty-five, and then I was only thirty; it was in 1814. I had a fine physique and a rare beauty. But I was a Jew, and despised by you Christians, and even by other Jews, because I had been poor for so long.”

“‘It is the worst of wrongs to despise someone for—’

“Don’t spout polite phrases at me. I feel disposed to talk this evening, and I am the type who is sincere when he does talk. Our ship is moving along well, the breeze is charming, and tomorrow morning we shall be in Venice. . . . But let me come back to the story about the curse we were speaking about, and my journey in France; I loved money mightily in 1814: it’s the only real passion I have ever felt.

“I spent all day in the streets of Venice, carrying a little coffer with little gold gems on it; but inside a secret drawer, I had cotton stock-

ings, handkerchiefs, and other contraband English merchandise. One of my uncles, just after my father's death and burial, informed the three of us that we had only five francs apiece; this good uncle gave me a napoleon (twenty francs). During the night, my mother made off with twenty-one francs; all I had left were four francs. I stole a violin case that a neighbor had hidden in a garret; I went and bought eight red cloth handkerchiefs. They cost me ten sous, and I sold them for eleven. The first day, I sold out my entire stock four times. I hawked my handkerchiefs to the sailors by the arsenal. The merchant, surprised by my initiative, asked me why I didn't buy a dozen handkerchiefs at a time; his shop was a good half league from the arsenal. I admitted that I had only four francs to my name and that my mother had stolen twenty-one francs from me. . . . He gave me a great kick in the behind and threw me out of his shop.

"The next morning at eight, I nevertheless returned to his place; I had already sold the eight handkerchiefs I had bought from him the previous evening. Because it was hot, I lay down in the shade of the procurators' palazzos. I had survived, I had had some Chio wine, and I had saved five sous from my commerce of the preceding day. . . . And this is the kind of life I lived from 1800 to 1814. I felt as if I had been blessed by God."

At this, the Jew's face took on a tender expression.

"My little business prospered, to the point where I often doubled my capital in a single day. Often, I would get on a gondola and go off to sell stockings to sailors on their ships. But whenever I would manage to accumulate a little savings, my mother or my sister would find some pretext for reconciling with me and for going on to rob me. Once, they took me to a goldsmith's shop, picked up some earrings and a necklace, and went out as if they would come right back—but

then ran off, leaving me behind as a pledge. The goldsmith asked me for fifty francs; I began to cry, explaining that I had only fourteen francs on me. I told him where I kept my coffer, and he sent off for it; but while I was wasting all this time with the goldsmith, my mother had also made off with the coffer. . . . The goldsmith gave me a royal beating.

“When he tired of hitting me, I explained to him that, if he was willing to let me keep my fourteen francs and if he would furnish me with a little drawer into which I could fashion a hidden compartment, I would promise to pay him ten sous a day: and I never failed. The goldsmith eventually entrusted me with earrings worth almost twenty francs, but he never allowed me to make more than five sous profit from each piece.

“In 1805, my capital amounted to 1,000 francs. It occurred to me that our law commands us to marry, and I thought about carrying out this duty. I had the bad luck of falling in love with a girl of my race called Stella. She had two brothers, one of whom was a quartermaster for French troops, and the other worked for the paymaster. On many nights, they would all come outside in front of the apartment they shared on the ground floor near Saint Paolo. I came across her weeping there one night. I took her for a prostitute; she seemed pretty to me; I offered to pay her with six sous’ worth of Chio wine. Her weeping redoubled; I told her she was a fool, and I moved on.

“But she had been really very pretty! The next night, at the same time, at about ten at night, having finished my sales at San Marco, I returned to the same place I had met her the night before; she wasn’t there. Three days later, I was luckier; I talked to her at length; she repulsed me with horror.

“I thought, ‘She must have seen me going by carrying my coffer

with its gold gems; she wants me to make her a present of one of my necklaces, and by God, that's exactly what I shall never do!' I resolved that I would not come down her street again; but despite that resolve and almost without admitting it to myself, I gave up drinking wine, and every day I took the money I would have spent on it and set it aside. I was even mad enough to keep the funds set aside and not to invest them in my business. In those days, monsieur, my funds tripled every week.

"Once I had saved twelve francs, which was the price of my ordinary gold necklaces, I went down Stella's street several times. At last, I encountered her; she rejected my gallant proposals with horror. But I was the best-looking young man in Venice. In our conversation, I told her that I had given up drinking wine for three months and had used the savings to pay for one of my necklaces, and I could offer it to her now. She did not reply, but she asked my advice about some trouble that had come to her since she had first seen me.

"Her brothers had conspired to clip some gold pieces they had managed to procure. (They plunged the pieces into a bath of aqua fortis.) The quartermaster had been put in prison, and the one who worked for the paymaster, for fear of drawing suspicions onto himself, didn't want to do anything to help. Stella did not ask me to go to the citadel; and I never spoke that word either, but I asked her to wait for me the following evening. . . ."

I said, "But we aren't getting any closer to your telling me about that curse you were under in France."

The Jew replied, "You're right; but if you are not willing to let me finish the tale of my marriage, which will not take long, I promise, I will stop altogether; I don't know why, but today I feel like talking about Stella.

“With a lot of effort, I arranged her brothers’ escape. They granted me their sister’s hand and brought their father to town, a poor Jew from Innsbruck. I had rented an apartment, with the rent, fortunately, paid in advance; I moved some furniture in. My father-in-law went to all his relatives in Venice announcing the marriage of his daughter. . . . Finally, but not until after an entire year of our taking care of him, on the eve of the wedding, he made off with more than 600 francs that he had gathered from his relatives. We had gone—he, his daughter, and I—to Murano to have a salad; that was where he disappeared. Meanwhile, my two brothers-in-law stole all the furniture I had brought into my apartment, which unfortunately had not been entirely paid for.

“My credit was ruined; my brothers-in-law, who had always been seen with me for the past year, went and told the furniture merchants that I was in Chiazza, where I sold everything off, and that from there I sent for more merchandise. . . . In a word, by dint of all these tricks, they had stolen more than 200 francs. I saw that I had to flee Venice; I got Stella a position as a children’s maid with the goldsmith who had trusted me with the necklaces to sell.

“The next day, first thing in the morning, having settled all my affairs, I gave twenty francs to Stella, keeping only six for myself, and I fled. I have never been so ruined, and in addition I was considered a thief. Fortunately, I had an idea when I arrived in Padua: I would write to the merchants in Venice, the ones to whom my brothers-in-law had sold the merchandise. I knew that the next day there would be a warrant for my arrest and that the gendarmes of the kingdom of Italy were no small threat.

“A celebrated lawyer in Padua had gone blind; he had need of a servant to lead him about; but his illness had given him so foul a

temper that his servants never lasted more than a month. 'I'll bet,' I said to myself, 'that he won't be able to chase me off.' I entered into his service, and the next day, when no one had come to see him and he was bored, I told him my whole life story.

"'If you don't save me,' I told him, 'I'll be arrested one of these days.'

"He exclaimed, 'Arrest one of my servants! I know how to prevent that kind of thing.'

"And so, monsieur, I grew in his favor. He went to bed early; in time, I got permission to go out and do a bit of business in the Padua cafés, between eight o'clock, when he went to bed, and two in the morning, when the rich people left the cafés.

"In eighteen months, I accumulated 200 francs. I submitted my resignation; he replied that he had left me considerable capital in his will, but he would not allow me to leave. I asked myself, 'But why, then, did you let me go out and do business?' I ran off; I paid my debts in Venice, which greatly enhanced my reputation; I married Stella; I taught her the business; and now, she knows more about it than I do."

The people who had gathered to listen said, "Your wife, then, is Madame Filippo."

"Yes, messieurs—and now, we are coming to the tale of my journeys and then, finally, of the *curse*.

"I had capital of more than one hundred louis. Now, let me tell you a story about another reconciliation with my mother, who robbed me yet again and then had my sister rob me. I had left Venice, having seen perfectly well that as long as I stayed there, I would continue to be duped by my family; I set myself up in Zara, where I made out wonderfully.

"A Croatian captain to whom I had furnished some uniforms for his company said to me one day:

"'Filippo, how would you like to make a fortune? We're leaving for France. Listen: I'm a friend of Baron Bradal, the colonel of the regiment, though I must not appear to be so. Come along with us as our mess officer. You'll make a lot of money, but the job is only a pretext: I've pretended to quarrel with the colonel, but he has put me in charge of all the regiment's supplies. I need someone intelligent to help, and you'll be my man.'

"Well, what do you expect, messieurs? I no longer loved my wife."

"What!" I exclaimed. "That poor Stella, to whom you had been so faithful?"

"The fact is, messieurs, that by now the only thing I loved was money. *And oh, how I loved it!*"

Everyone began to laugh at that, at the passion the Jew had put into that exclamation.

"I was appointed mess officer; I left Zara.

"After forty-eight days' march, we came to Simplon. The 500 francs that I had taken with me in leaving Zara had grown to 1,500, and moreover I had acquired a very nice covered wagon and two horses. But my miseries began at Simplon: I almost died spending twenty-two nights sleeping outside in the cold."

"Ah!" I said, "so you had to bivouac."

"Every day I made fifty or sixty francs; but every night, in that intense cold, I was under threat of dying. At long last, the army crossed over that terrifying mountain; we came to Lausanne, and there, I connected with Monsieur Perrin. Ah, what a man! He was a brandy merchant. Myself, I knew how to sell in six different languages, but

he knew how to buy. Yes, an excellent man! But a little too violent. If a Cossack didn't want to pay for his drinks and he found himself alone in the shop, Monsieur Perrin would beat the man bloody.

"I would say to him, 'But Monsieur Perrin, my friend, we're making one hundred francs a day; what do we care if some drunk cheats us out of two or three francs?'

"He would reply, 'What can I do? It's stronger than I am: I don't like Cossacks.'

"'You're going to get us killed. My friend, how is it we're still in business?'

"The French food suppliers didn't dare come back to the camp, because they never got paid; we made huge profits; on our arrival in Lyon, we had 14,000 francs in our chest. There, out of pity for the poor French merchants, I did some smuggling. There was a great deal of tobacco outside the Saint Clair Gate; they came and begged me to get it into the city; I told them to be patient and wait two days until the colonel, my friend, took up his post as commandant. Then, during the following five days, I loaded my wagon with tobacco. At the gate, the French watchmen grumbled but didn't dare stop me. On the fifth day, one of them, who was drunk, struck me; I whipped my horse and tried to drive on, but the others, seeing me being thrashed, prevented me. I was bleeding, and I asked that they take me to the commandant of the neighboring guards; he was a member of the regiment but did not want to seem to recognize me, and sent me to prison. I said to myself, 'My wagon will be emptied and the poor merchants will be sacrificed.' On the way to the prison, I slipped two great ecus to my escort in order to be taken to see my colonel. In front of the soldiers, he treated me very harshly, adding a threat to have me hanged.

"But once we were alone, he said to me, 'Courage! Tomorrow I'll put another captain in charge of the Saint Clair Gate, and instead of one wagon, take two through.' But I didn't want to. I gave him 200 sequins as his share. 'What?' he said to me. 'You've given me all this trouble for this?'

"I replied, 'We have to take some pity on the poor merchants.'

"Our business—that of Monsieur Perrin and me—went on admirably all the way to Dijon. But there, monsieur, in a single night we lost more than 12,000 francs. The day's sales had been splendid: there had been a great military parade, and we were the sole suppliers; our net gain had been more than 1,000 francs. And that same day, at midnight, some miserable Croat wanted to get away without paying. Monsieur Perrin, seeing he was alone, leaped upon him, showering him with blows and leaving him bloody. I told him, 'Monsieur Perrin, you're crazy; this man drank a total of 6 francs' worth, true, but if you've left him with enough strength to complain about it, we're going to have a real uproar over this.' Monsieur Perrin had tossed the Croat outside the door of our shop, apparently dead but in fact only knocked out; he began to cry out; soldiers from the nearby bivouacs heard him; they came to find him lying in front of our door, covered in blood; Monsieur Perrin tried to defend himself and got himself slashed eight times with a saber.

"I said to the soldiers: 'I'm not the guilty one; he is; bring me to the colonel of the Croat regiment.'

"'We're not going to wake up the colonel for you,' said one of the soldiers. Try as I might to beg them not to, soon three or four thousand soldiers were ransacking our shop. The officers, who were at the rear of the crowd, could not penetrate far enough in to assert their authority. I thought Monsieur Perrin was dead; and as for myself, I

was in a pitiable state. Ultimately, monsieur, they pillaged more than 12,000 francs' worth of wine and brandy from us.

"At dawn, I succeeded in escaping; my colonel had provided four men to carry off Monsieur Perrin in case he was still living. I found him among a group of soldiers and brought him to a surgeon. I told him, 'We have to separate now, my friend; you're going to get me killed.' He reproached me bitterly for having abandoned him and for having told his assailants that he alone was the guilty one. But as I saw it, that was the only way to stop the looting.

"But Monsieur Perrin kept on insisting so strongly that in the end we started up a second business; we paid soldiers to guard our tavern. In two months, we had each made 12,000 francs; unfortunately, in a duel, Monsieur Perrin killed one of the soldiers who had been working as a guard for us since we started up our second business. 'You're going to get me killed,' I said to him again, and this time I did quit poor Monsieur Perrin. A bit later, I can tell you the story of how he came to die.

"I came to Lyon, where I bought watches and diamonds at a very good price, for I was good at dealing with all sorts of merchandise. You could set me down in any country with just fifty francs in my pocket, and at the end of six months I would have both survived and tripled my capital.

"I concealed my diamonds in a secret compartment I had built into my wagon. The regiment had left for Valence and Avignon, and I followed after three days in Lyon.

"But, monsieur, when I arrived at Valence at eight in the evening, it was dark and raining; I knocked on the door of an inn; no one responded; I knocked louder; they called out that there was no lodging

available for a 'Cossack'; I knocked again, and they began throwing rocks down at me from the second floor. 'Well, clearly,' I said to myself, 'I'm going to die tonight in this miserable town.' I didn't know where the commander in charge of the town was; no one wanted to talk to me; no one would serve as a guide for me. 'The commandant will be in bed,' I said to myself, 'and won't want to receive me.'

"Instead of dying, I saw that I would have to sacrifice some merchandise; I gave a glass of brandy to the sentinel, who was a Hungarian. Hearing me speak Hungarian, he took pity on me and told me to wait there until they came for me. I was dying of cold; finally, a corporal came for me. I gave him a drink, and then I gave one to the whole group of guards. At last, a sergeant conducted me to the commandant. Oh, what a fine man, monsieur! I did not know him, but he had me enter right away. I explained to him that, out of hatred for the king,¹ no innkeeper would give me a place to stay, even for pay. He exclaimed, 'Well, they will give you lodging for free, then!' He procured a fine billeting for me for two nights, and four men were assigned to accompany me.

"I returned to that inn on the large plaza, where they had thrown stones at me; I knocked twice; I said in French, which I speak very well, that I had four men with me and that if they did not open up, I would break down the door; no response. So we went off to find a good, heavy board, and we set ourselves to battering the door. It was more than half broken in when a man abruptly opened it. He was a big one, about six feet tall; he had a saber in one hand and a lit candle in the other. 'Now, there's going to be an uproar,' I thought, 'and they'll loot my wagon.' So, even though I had been given a free billeting, I cried out: 'Monsieur, I'll pay in advance if you like.'

“‘Oh, it’s you, Filippo!’ cried the man, throwing down his saber and embracing me. ‘What, my friend Filippo, don’t you recognize Bonnard, the corporal of the Twentieth Regiment?’

“‘When I heard that name, I embraced him, too, and I sent the four soldiers back. Bonnard had lodged for six months at my father’s house in Vicence.

“‘I’ll let you have my bed,’ he said to me.

“‘I’m dying of hunger,’ I replied; ‘I’ve been walking all over Valence for the last three hours.’

“‘I’ll wake my servant, and you’ll soon have a supper.’ At that he embraced me, and he never tired of looking at me and questioning me. I accompanied him down to the cellar, where he chose an excellent wine concealed under a layer of sand. As we drank and awaited supper, a beautiful young woman of eighteen came in to us. ‘Ah, so you’re up!’ said Bonnard; ‘So much the better. My friend, this is my sister; and look here, you ought to marry her; you’re a good man, and I’ll give her a dowry of 600 francs.’

“‘But I’m already married,’ I told him.

“‘Married! Ha! I don’t believe a word of it. Besides, where is your wife?’

“‘She is in Zara, where she is tending to business.’

“‘Well, let her go to the devil along with her business; stay here in France, and you’ll marry my sister, the prettiest girl around.’

“Catherine was in fact very pretty; she gazed at me with her large eyes. ‘Monsieur is an officer?’ she asked finally, fooled by the greatcoat I was wearing, bought from the quartermaster in Dijon.

“‘No, mademoiselle; I am the chief food supplier for general headquarters, and I have on my person 200 louis; I can assure you that

very few of our officers could say as much.' In fact, I had 600 louis, but one must be prudent.

"Well, what can I say, monsieur? Bonnard kept me from going away; he rented me a handsome little shop close to the guards and close to the gate, from which I sold to the soldiers; and though I did not continue to follow the army, I still had days on which I earned my eight or ten francs. Bonnard continued to say to me, 'You must marry my sister.' Little by little, Catherine had taken up the habit of coming to my little shop; sometimes, she would stay there for three or four hours. At last, monsieur, I fell madly in love with her. And she was even more in love than I was; but God gave us the grace not to lose our heads. 'How on earth can I marry you?' I asked her. 'I am already married.'

"'Didn't you leave your wife in Zara with all that merchandise? Let her live on then, her in Zara and you here with us. Go into business with my brother, or keep your trade separate from his; you're doing a good business, and you will do even better.'

"I should mention, monsieur, that I acted as a bank in Valence, and, by buying up solid letters of exchange on the Lyon bank, signed by businessmen whom Bonnard knew, I sometimes made 100 or a 120 francs per week.

"I stayed in Valence until the autumn. I didn't know what to do; I was dying with desire to marry Catherine, and toward that end I had given her a dress and a hat from Lyon. When the three of us went walking, her brother, she, and I, all eyes were on Catherine; she really was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. She would often say to me, 'If you don't want me as your wife, I'll stay with you as your servant; but please, never leave me.'

“She would go to the shop ahead of me, to spare me the trouble of opening up for business. In short, monsieur, I was absolutely mad with love for her, and she was in a similar state, though we both continued to keep our heads.

“Toward the end of the autumn (of 1814), the ‘allies’ left Valence. I said to Bonnard, ‘The other merchants in this town are going to kill me; they know about how I’ve made my money here.’

“‘Leave if you like,’ Bonnard replied with a sigh; ‘I don’t want to force anyone to do anything. But if you stay with us and marry my sister, I’ll give her half of my holdings; and if anyone so much as speaks ill of you, I’ll handle them.’

“I put off the day of my departure three times. At last, the final troops of the rear guard had moved on to Lyon, and I resolved on leaving. Catherine, her brother, and I spent a night in tears. What can I say, monsieur? I was turning my back on my happiness by leaving this family; God did not want me to be a happy man.

“I finally left on November 7, 1814. I will never forget that day; I could not drive my wagon; I was obliged to hire a man to drive halfway from Valence to Vienna.

“Two days after my departure, as I was hitching my horse in Vienna, whom should I see arriving at the same inn? Catherine. She rushed over to embrace me. They knew her at the inn; she told them that she had come to visit an aunt in Vienna. She kept repeating, as she wept hot tears, ‘I want to be your servant; but if you don’t want me, I will throw myself into the Rhone without going to see my aunt.’

“Everyone at the inn came out and crowded around us. She who was so reserved, who normally remained silent in front of strangers, now was speaking and weeping without restraint, embracing me in

front of everyone. I quickly got her to mount up into my wagon, and we drove off. A quarter of a league outside the town, I stopped. 'We must say goodbye to each other,' I told her. She said nothing further. She held on to me tightly, with convulsive motions. I was afraid: I could imagine her going to throw herself into the Rhone if I sent her away. I repeated it again: 'I am married, married in the eyes of God.'

"'Yes, I know that; I will be your servant.' I had to stop my wagon maybe ten different times on the way from Vienna to Lyon; but she would never agree to leaving. 'If I cross a bridge on the Rhone with her,' I said to myself, 'that will be a sign of God's will.'

"Well, monsieur, to tell the truth, without observing it myself, I found we had crossed the Guillotière Bridge and arrived in Lyon. At the inn, they took us for husband and wife and gave us just one room.

"In Lyon, there were a great number of merchants fighting over customers; I went among them and began selling watches and diamonds; I made 10 francs a day, and thanks to the admirable economy of Catherine, we spent only 4. I had taken lodgings that we furnished nicely. At that time, I had 13,000 francs, which, because of my banking business, brought in from 1,500 to 1,800 francs. I had never been so rich as during those eighteen months I spent with Catherine. I was so rich that I bought a little luxury coach, and every Sunday we would take drives outside the city.

"One day, a Jew of my acquaintance came to see me and got me to take my coach and accompany him a couple of leagues outside Lyon. There, he stopped me and said, 'Phillipe, you have a wife and a child; they are very unhappy. . . .' Then he gave me a letter from my wife and departed. I came back to Lyon alone.

"Those two leagues seemed endless to me. The letter from my wife

was full of reproaches, but they touched me less than the thought of the son I had abandoned! I saw from her letter that my business in Zara was going well enough. . . . But my son, whom I had abandoned! . . . The thought was killing me.

“That night, I was unable to speak, and Catherine noticed it. But she had such a good heart, such a sense of delicacy. . . . Three weeks passed without her asking the cause of my unhappiness; when she did, I said at once, ‘I have a son.’

“‘I guessed it. Let’s go,’ she said. ‘I’ll pose as your servant in Zara.’

“‘Impossible: my wife knows everything; look at her letter.’

“The insults my wife used in the letter made Catherine redden, as did the contemptuous tone she used in speaking of her, whom she had never met. I embraced her and consoled her as best I could. But what can I say, monsieur? After that fatal letter, the three months I spent in Lyon were hellish; I could not decide which side I was on.

“One night: ‘What if I left right now?’ I asked myself. Catherine was sleeping deeply by my side. Once the idea came to me, it was like a kind of balm spreading through my soul. I thought, ‘This must be an inspiration from God!’ And as I looked at Catherine, I began to say to myself, ‘What madness! I cannot do it.’

“And so the grace of God abandoned me, and I fell back into my bitter state of mind. But then, without quite knowing what I was doing, I began to get dressed quietly, keeping my gaze fixed on Catherine.

“I dared not open the desk; everything I had was hidden in the bed; there were 500 francs in the chest of drawers for a payment she was to make the next day in my absence. I took the money; I went

downstairs; I went to the shed where my wagon was, I paid to rent a horse, and I left.

"I constantly kept turning around to look behind me. 'Catherine will come running after me,' I thought to myself; 'if I see her, I am lost.'

"For a moment of peace, at two leagues outside of Lyon, I stopped at a posthouse. In my difficulties, I arranged with a driver to get my wagon and meet me at Chambéry; I would clearly have no further use for it; I can't recall what made me think this was a good idea. Once I arrived in Chambéry, I felt all the bitterness of my loss. I went to a notary and made out a document signing over everything I owned to 'Madame Catherine Bonnard, my wife'; I was thinking of her honor, and of our neighbors.

"When I had paid the notary and found myself outside holding the document, I felt I didn't have the strength to write to Catherine. I went back in the notary's and had him write to her in my name; one of his clerks accompanied me to the post office and mailed the packet in front of me. In a dark tavern, I had another letter written to Bonnard in Valence. I notified him of the transfer in my name, which amounted to 14,000 francs at least. I added that his sister was very ill in Lyon and was awaiting him there. I stamped and mailed this second letter myself. Since then, I have never heard anything about either of them.

"I found my wagon at the foot of Mount Cenis. I cannot recall why I was so attached to this vehicle, which was the immediate cause of my troubles, as you will see.

"The real cause was, no doubt, the terrible *curse* that Catherine had hurled at me. Young and impassioned as she was (she was just

twenty years old), beautiful, innocent—because she had had no other lovers before me, a man she wanted to serve and honor as her husband—because of all this, her voice no doubt found ready access to the ear of God, and she entreated him to punish me severely.

“I bought a passport and a horse. I don’t know how I came to think of it, but when I realized at the foot of Mount Cenis that I was on a border, I had the idea of moving a bit of contraband with the help of my 500 francs; I bought some watches and put them in a secret compartment. I proceeded bravely right up to the border guards; the guards headed straight for my wagon; probably the watchmaker had sold me out; they seized my watches; I incurred also a fine of 100 ecus; I gave them 50 francs, and they let me go; I now had no more than 100 francs.

“This bad fortune woke me up. I said to myself, ‘So this is how one is reduced from 500 to 100 francs in a single moment! I would happily sell off the horse and the wagon, but I’m a long way from Zara.’

“While this sinister thought was racking me with remorse, a guard came running up behind me, crying out and making me stop. ‘You need to give me twenty francs, you dog of a Jew; the others back there tricked me, and I got only five francs while they got ten, and now I’ve had to go to all the trouble of chasing you here.’ It was almost night-fall; the man was drunk and insulting me.

“‘What!’ I exclaimed to myself: ‘now I have to reduce my poor hundred francs even further!’

“The guard gripped me by the collar; the demon tempted me; I stabbed him and threw him into the river, fifteen or twenty feet below the road; this was the first crime I ever committed. ‘Now I’m lost!’ I said to myself.

“As I neared Suze, I heard some noise behind me; I spurred my horse to a gallop; he took off so fast that I could not control him; the wagon tipped over, and I broke a leg. I thought, ‘Catherine has cursed me; heaven is just; I’ll be captured and hanged within two months.’

“None of that happened.”

SAN FRANCESCO A RIPA

Ariste and Dorante have written on this subject, which gave Éraсте the idea of writing on it, too.

I am translating here, from an Italian chronicler, the details concerning the love affair of a Roman princess with a Frenchman.¹ In 1726, at the beginning of the preceding century, all the abuses associated with nepotism flourished at Rome. Never had the papal court been so brilliant. Pope Benedict XIII (Orsini) reigned—or, more accurately, it was his nephew Prince Campobasso, in his uncle's name, who oversaw all matters, from the greatest to the smallest. Foreigners from all corners of the world flocked to Rome; Italian princes, Spanish nobles still rich from the New World's gold—they all crowded together there. All the rich and powerful men considered themselves above the laws. Gallantry and magnificence seemed the sole occupations of all those foreigners from so many nations.

The two nieces of the pope, the countess Orsini and the princess Campobasso, shared in their uncle's power and received all the homage the court had to offer. Their beauty would have distinguished them in even the highest ranks of society. L'Orsini, as people in Rome called her informally, was lighthearted and *disinvolta*, whereas La Campobasso was tender and pious; but that tender soul was susceptible to the most violent transports. Without quite being declared enemies, and while encountering each other on a daily basis at the papal

court and in their own homes, the two ladies were rivals in everything: beauty, consideration, and wealth.

Countess Orsini, less pretty but brilliant, clever, busy, and scheming, had lovers to whom she paid scarcely any attention and who reigned in her heart for no more than a day. Happiness to her was to see two hundred people in a salon and find herself the center of attention. She laughed at her cousin La Campobasso, who had been seen for three years straight in the company of a Spanish duke but in the end had commanded him to leave Rome within twenty-four hours on pain of death. "Ever since that great dispatch," L'Orsini said, "my sublime cousin has never smiled. Now, some months later, it's clear that the poor woman is dying of boredom, or of love, and her husband, a man of some sophistication, will manage to have this ennui of hers taken for the highest kind of piety in the eyes of our uncle the pope. I suspect that this piety will lead her to undertake a Spanish pilgrimage."

La Campobasso, however, was far from regretting her Spaniard, who had mortally bored her for two years. If she missed him, she would have sent to find him. Hers was one of those characters at once natural and naive in their indifference and in their passion, a type common enough in Rome. Out of a state of exalted devotion, and although scarcely over twenty-three years of age and in the very flower of her beauty, she came to throw herself on her knees before her uncle, beseeching him to grant her the "papal benediction," which, as should be more widely known, absolves all sins, with the exception of two or three atrocious ones, *even without confession*. The good Benedict XIII wept with tenderness. "Stand up," he said to his niece; "you don't need my benediction; you are worth more than I am in the eyes of God."

Infallible though he may have been, he was wrong about that—

as was all of Rome. La Campobasso was wildly romantic; she had a lover but was deeply unhappy. It had been several months since she had been seeing, almost every day, the chevalier de Sénecé, nephew to the Duke of Saint-Aignan, then the ambassador for Louis XV in Rome.

The son of one of the mistresses of the regent of France, Philippe d'Orléans, the young Sénecé enjoyed the highest favor in France, a longtime colonel though he was scarcely twenty-two, with the habits of the utterly self-assured as well as the wherewithal to justify them, though he did not always seem that way. Taking into account his gaiety, his tendency to find amusement in everything at all times, a certain carelessness, his bravery, his good nature: putting all these traits together, one would have praised France by saying of him that he was the very pattern of that nation.

Princess Campobasso fell in love with him at first sight. "But," she had said to him, "I do not trust you, because after all, you are French; on the day that people around my uncle in Rome say that I am in love with you, I will be convinced that you were the one to make it known, and on that day I will no longer love you."

While thus toying with love, La Campobasso found herself stricken with a real passion. The chevalier likewise had felt attraction to her, but they had known each other for eight months, and the time it takes for passion to ripen for an Italian outdoes that of a Frenchman. The vanity of the chevalier consoled him in his impatience, and he had already had two or three portraits of La Campobasso sent back to Paris. Moreover, overcome by all the goods and advantages heaped upon him, so to speak, since infancy, he maintained that insouciance of his even in his own personal vanity, which is ordinarily the very thing that most troubles the hearts of people of his nation.

The eccentricities of the princess had amused him. She had admitted to him from the first month of their acquaintance that for the first time she really was in love, but it was only after several months, and after having to submit to some of the strangest proofs, that he had been able to come to a full understanding with her.

Frequently thereafter, for example, on the feast day of Saint Balbine, for whom she was named, he had to overcome a torrent of sincere and ardent pious remorse on her part. S  nec   had not made her "forget her religion," as happens often with more vulgar women in Italy, but rather had to conquer her scruples by main force, and the combat was renewed frequently.

This obstacle—the first one that the highly favored young man had ever encountered—amused him, and it kept him in the habit of being tender and attentive regarding the princess. There was also another, and less romantic, reason. S  nec   had only one confidant, and that was his ambassador, to whom he reported a great deal that he learned from La Campobasso, who knew everything, and the importance this gave him in the eyes of the Duke of Saint-Aignan flattered him.

La Campobasso, on the other hand, had never been particularly interested in the social advantages a lover might bring. For her, being loved or not being loved was all that mattered. "I am sacrificing my eternal happiness for him," she said to herself; "while he, a heretic and a Frenchman, has nothing of comparable value to sacrifice for me." But the chevalier seemed so likable, his gaiety so inexhaustible and at the same time so natural and spontaneous, that her heart was touched; she was charmed. In his presence, everything she had planned to say to him evaporated, along with all her somber thoughts. And this state, so new for such a high-born, serious soul, would

continue for a long time after each time Sénecé departed. Eventually, she realized she could not think, could not live away from him.

For two centuries, the Spanish were the fashionable foreigners in Rome, but lately the mode had begun to favor the French. People were beginning to understand that national type, which brought pleasure and cheer everywhere it turned up. That trait was in those days found only among the French, and since the Revolution of 1789 it has died out altogether. The reason is that such an ongoing gaiety requires a carefree attitude, and no one in France is sure of his career anymore, not even the man of genius.

War since then has been declared between men of Sénecé's class and the rest of the nation. Rome, too, was very different then from what she is today. No one then, in 1726, could have suspected what was going to happen sixty-seven years later, when the people, paid by some clerics, slit the throat of the Jacobin Basseville, who, he said, wanted to civilize the capital city of the Christian world.²

For the first time, because of Sénecé, La Campobasso had lost her reason, suffering greatly over entertaining thoughts that reason could not approve. In such a character so severe and sincere, once Sénecé had overcome her religion, which for her had likewise been something separate from reason, it was inevitable that this love of hers should grow into the most frantic and desperate passion.

The princess, in the past, had honored one Monsignor Feraterra and had made his fortune. What must she have thought, then, when Feraterra told her not only that Sénecé had been going more often than usual to the home of the countess Orsini but also that he was the cause of her having dismissed a celebrated castrato who had nominally been her lover for several weeks!

Our story begins at this point, on the evening of the day on which La Campobasso heard this fatal bit of news.

She lay immobile in a great golden leather armchair. Around her, on a little table of black marble, were two great long-stemmed silver lamps, masterpieces crafted by the famous Benvenuto Cellini, which illuminated, or rather emphasized, the shadows of this immense room on the ground floor of her palazzo, ornamented with paintings blackened by time; for already at that time, the era of the great painters was long over.

Sitting with the princess, almost at her feet, in a little chair of ebony decorated with great golden ornaments, was the young Sénecé, who had come to stretch out his elegant person. The princess stared at him, and, far from running to him and throwing herself in his arms, she had not spoken a word to him.

In 1726, Paris was already the city most renowned for the elegances of life and for jewelry. Sénecé regularly had couriers from there bringing him everything that could further set off the graces of one of the handsomest men in France. Despite the self-assurance so natural to a man of his rank, who had made his first conquests among the beauties of the regent's court under the direction of his uncle the celebrated Canillac, one of the regent's roués,³ it was nonetheless possible to detect some hint of embarrassment on the features of Sénecé. The lovely blond hair of the princess was in slight disorder; her large, deep, blue eyes were fixed upon him: their expression was uncertain. Was there some mortal vengeance afoot? Or was this simply an interval of deep seriousness in her passionate love?

At last, in a weak voice, she said, "So, you don't love me anymore?"

A long silence followed upon this declaration of war.

It was not easy for the princess to deprive herself of the charms of Sénecé's presence; in fact, if she had not made a scene, he had been on the verge of murmuring a hundred little endearments to her; but

she had too much pride to put off the matter. A coquette is jealous out of self-love; an amorous woman out of habit; a woman who loves sincerely and passionately has a clear awareness of her rights. That manner of looking at him, unique to the passion of a Roman, amused Sénecé a great deal; he found depth and incertitude in her gaze; he could, so to speak, see her soul in the nude. L'Orsini did not possess this grace.

However, as the silence continued to be prolonged, the young Frenchman, who was not very agile in penetrating the hidden feelings of an Italian heart, found in that silence an air of tranquillity and of reasonableness that put him at his ease. But then, suddenly, he felt uneasy: in traversing the cellars and subterranean passages that led from the neighboring house into this ground-floor room of the Campobasso palazzo, the charming, brand-new embroidery of his charming outfit, just arrived from Paris, had become covered in spiderwebs. These spiderwebs made him uneasy, because he had always felt a special horror for that insect.

Sénecé, thinking he perceived calm in the princess's gaze, began to think of avoiding the scene by turning the tables and reproaching her for saying such a thing; but the irritation he felt made him serious. He said to himself, "Wouldn't this be a good time to make her see the truth? She just brought the subject up herself; that's half of the trouble already over. Clearly, I'm not made for love. I've never seen anything as beautiful as this woman with those remarkable eyes of hers. She has bad manners, though, and she makes me sneak through disgusting underground passages; but she is the niece of the sovereign whom my king has sent me here to work with. And then she's blond, in a country where all the women are brunettes: that is a major distinction. Every day, I hear her beauty praised to the skies by men with impeccable taste, men who never in a thousand years would guess that they

were speaking to the fortunate possessor of all those charms. As for the power a man should have over his mistress, I have no concern in that regard. If I wanted to take the trouble, with a word I could take her away from her palace, from her golden furnishings, from her uncle-monarch, and all just to carry her away to France, to live out her days sorrowfully on one of my estates. . . . Good Lord, the image of that denouement inspires the strongest resolution in me never to speak such a word. L'Orsini is much less pretty: she loves me, if she actually does love me, just a little more than she loved that castrato Butafoco I made her drop the other day; but she knows how things are done, she knows how to live, one can come to her home in a carriage. And I am quite sure she will never make a scene: she doesn't love me enough for that."

All during this long silence, the fixed gaze of the princess never left the handsome face of the young Frenchman.

"I will never see him again," she said to herself. And abruptly, she threw herself into his arms, covering with kisses his face and those eyes of his that would never again grow warm at the sight of her. It would be undervaluing the chevalier to think that he did not immediately forget all his plans for breaking off with her; but his mistress was too profoundly moved to forget her jealousy. A few seconds later, Sénéce looked at her with astonishment as tears of rage fell rapidly from her eyes. "What!" she exclaimed to herself under her breath. "I abased myself down to the level of accusing him of changing his affections; I reproached him—I, who swore never to notice such a thing! And all that wasn't low enough; I had to give in to the passion that his charming face inspires in me! Oh, vile, vile princess!"

She brushed away her tears and seemed to have regained some tranquillity.

"Chevalier, we must come to an end," she said calmly. "You

regularly visit the countess. . . .” Here, she went extremely pale. “If you love her, go there every day, fine; but never return here. . . .” Here, she stopped despite herself. She waited for some word from the chevalier; no words were spoken. With a slight, convulsive motion, she continued, her teeth somewhat clenched: “It will be the end of my life, and of yours.”

This threat made up the chevalier’s mind; until now, his only reaction was surprise at such an unexpected outburst after such a bout of tenderness, but now he began to laugh.

The subtle red on the cheeks of the princess turned scarlet. “She’s going to suffocate from her rage,” the chevalier thought; “she’s going to have a stroke.” He leaned forward to unlace her dress; she pushed him back with a resolve and a force to which he was not accustomed. Sénécé recalled later that as he tried to take her in his arms, he could hear her talking to herself. He drew back a little: a pointless discretion, because she seemed not to see him any longer. In a low, intense voice, as if she were speaking to her confessor, she was saying to herself: “He insults me, and he mocks me. Considering his age and the indiscretion natural to men of his country, he will no doubt go tell L’Orsini all the depths of indignity to which I’ve sunk. . . . I cannot rely on my own judgment, not even trust myself to remain unmoved in the sight of that beautiful face. . . .” Here, there was a new silence, which irritated the chevalier anew. Finally, the princess arose and repeated, in an even more somber tone, “We must come to an end.”

Sénécé had interpreted this as a resolution, which he assumed meant there was no longer an opportunity for coming to a serious understanding, and he hazarded a few light remarks on a bit of news everyone was talking about in Rome. . . .

“Leave me now, chevalier,” the princess interrupted; “I am not feeling well.”

“The lady is bored,” said Sénecé to himself as he hurried to obey; “and there is nothing more contagious than boredom.”

The princess watched him as he made his way to the other end of the room. . . . “And I was about to make a fool of myself over him!” she exclaimed to herself with a bitter smile. “Fortunately, his inappropriate pleasantries brought me back to myself. What a fool he is! How could I love someone who understands so little? He wants to amuse me with some little story, when it’s a question of my life, and of his!

“Ah, I recognize it, this dark, sinister disposition of mine that causes me such misery!” And at that she rose up out of her chair in a fury. “How lovely his eyes looked when he started telling that anecdote. . . . I have to admit that the poor chevalier’s intention was benign. He recognized this dark trait in my personality, and he simply wanted to pull me out from the somber mood that was tormenting me instead of asking me the cause of it. . . . That sweet Frenchman! To tell the truth, had I ever really been happy before falling in love with him?”

She began to think again of all the delicious perfections of her lover. And from there, she slowly moved to contemplating the graces of the countess Orsini. Now, everything began to blacken. The most tormenting jealousy seized her heart. Indeed, a grim foreboding had been bothering her for two months now, and her only lighthearted moments had been those she had passed with the chevalier; yet whenever she was not in his arms, she spoke to him with bitterness.

Her evening was hideous. Exhausted and even a little calmed by her sorrow, she had the idea of speaking with the chevalier. “After all, he saw me angry, but he does not really know the cause of my feelings. Perhaps he doesn’t love the countess; perhaps he goes to her only because a traveler must partake of the society in which he finds himself,

and above all when it is a matter of the sovereign's family. Perhaps if I were to formally introduce Séneccé, if he could openly be seen visiting me, he would spend as much time here as he does with Orsini."

"But no," she cried angrily. "I will only debase myself by speaking; he will despise me, and that will be the only result. That empty-headed giddiness of Orsini's character, which I've so despised, fool that I've been, is in fact more appealing than my own, and especially in the eyes of a Frenchman. What can be more absurd than to always be serious, as if life were not serious enough anyway? What will become of me when I no longer have my chevalier to give me life, to ignite a little fire in my cold heart?"

She had commanded her doors to be shut, but that command did not apply to Monsignor Feraterra, who had come, at about one in the morning, to narrate to her what he had observed at L'Orsini's. Up until now, this prelate had served the princess and her love affair in good faith, but he had no doubt that Séneccé would soon come to an understanding with countess Orsini, if he had not done so already.

He thought, "A pious princess is of more use to me than a woman of society. There will always be someone she prefers to me—her lover. And if one day this lover is a Roman, he might find favor with her uncle the cardinal. But if I can convert her, she will think of me, her spiritual director, before everyone else, and she will do so with all the fiery passion of her character. Then, is there any limit to what I can hope for from her uncle?" The ambitious prelate let his thoughts wander, lost in visions of his delicious future. He pictured the princess going down on her knees before her uncle to plead for the red hat for him. . . . The pope would be very appreciative of what he was about to undertake. Once the princess was converted, he would bring irrefutable proofs to the pope of her intrigue with the young French-

man. Pious, sincere, and abhorring the French as he did, His Holiness would feel eternal gratitude toward the agent who managed to bring so distasteful an intrigue to an end. Feraterra's origins were in the highest level of nobility in Ferrara; he was rich, and he was over fifty. . . . Animated by the prospect of gaining the red hat so quickly, he accomplished miracles; he dared to change his behavior around the princess abruptly. During the two months that Sénece had toyed with her, it clearly would have been dangerous to attack him, for the prelate, misunderstanding Sénece, believed him to be ambitious.

The reader will have found these diatribes by the young princess, who was out of her mind with love, and the prelate, who was out of his with ambition, tedious enough. Feraterra began with a simple avowal that what he was about to tell her was no more than the sad truth. After a startling beginning like that, he found it quite easy to revive in her all those religious and passionately pious sentiments that had been only half-asleep in the heart of the young Roman; hers was a sincere faith. "Every unholy passion must end in misery and dishonor," the prelate told her. It was broad daylight by the time he exited the Campobasso palazzo. He had obtained a promise from the new convert not to receive Sénece that day. The promise cost the princess little; she believed herself to be a pious woman, and in any case, she was afraid of making herself contemptible in the eyes of the chevalier.

The resolution was firmly held, until four o'clock; that was the time the chevalier would normally arrive. He went through the street behind the Campobasso palazzo, saw the signal announcing the impossibility of seeing her that day, and, perfectly content, went directly on to the home of the countess Orsini.

La Campobasso felt she was slowly going mad. One strange idea

or resolution after another raced through her mind. Suddenly, she came down the great staircase of the palazzo like a woman insane, leaped up into her coach, and cried out to the coachman: "To the Orsini palazzo!"

Her extreme misery was pushing her, almost against her will, to go and see her cousin. She found her there, among some fifty guests. All the wits in Rome, all the social climbers, unable to penetrate the Campobasso palazzo, flowed naturally into the Orsini one. The arrival of the princess was an event; everyone moved back out of respect; she did not condescend to notice them: she stared straight ahead at her rival, wondering at her. Every one of her cousin's charms was like a dagger in her heart. After some opening compliments, L'Orsini, seeing she was quiet and preoccupied, turned back to the sparkling, *disinvolta* conversation she had been engaged in.

"Her gaiety is so much better suited to the chevalier than my insane, boring passion!" she exclaimed to herself.

In an inexplicable moment of transport, composed of both admiration and hatred, she rushed over and embraced the countess. She could see nothing but her cousin's charms; from afar or from close up, they seemed equally adorable. She compared her hair to her own, her eyes, her skin. This examination ended in her feeling a sense of horror and disgust for herself. Everything about her rival seemed adorable, everything seemed superior.

Immobile, somber, La Campobasso stood like a statue of basalt in the midst of that chattering, gesticulating crowd. People came in, people went out; all the racket was irritating to her. But imagine the change in her feelings when she heard the servant announcing the entry of Monsieur de Sénécé! In the early days of their relationship,

it had been agreed that he would speak very little to her in society, as was suitable for a foreign diplomat who would encounter only two or three times a month the niece of the sovereign to whom he was assigned.

Sénecé greeted her with the respect and seriousness to which they were both accustomed; then, turning to the countess Orsini, he switched to that gaiety of tone, verging on intimacy, that you use when you find yourself with a clever woman who welcomes you into her home on a daily basis. La Campobasso was devastated. "The countess shows me what I ought to have been," she said to herself. "There—that's what I ought to be, and that's exactly what I shall never be!" She left in the deepest misery a human can feel, nearly resolved to go home and take poison. All the pleasures of love that Sénecé had given her could not begin to equal the surfeit of grief into which she was plunged all that long night. One might say that these Roman souls have enormous treasuries of energy, unknown to other women, which they spend on suffering.

In the morning, Sénecé passed the house and again saw the negative signal. He was about to go on his way happily enough; however, he felt nettled. "So, it was my dismissal she was giving me the other day." He got out of his coach and went down into the underground passage, intending to force open the door of the great room on the ground floor where the princess would receive him.

"What! You dare to show your face here!" said the startled princess.

The young Frenchman thought, "This surprise of hers is not quite sincere; she never comes to this room unless she's expecting me."

The chevalier took her hand, and she trembled. Her eyes welled

up with tears; she was so pretty at that moment that the chevalier felt love for her. As for her, she forgot all the sermons that religion had been providing her for two days. She threw herself into his arms, perfectly happy: "And this is the happiness that L'Orsini will enjoy from now on. . . ." S  nec  , misunderstanding the Roman mind as usual, believed she wanted to break off with him but remain on friendly terms. "It would not be good for me, attached as I am to the king's ambassador, to have a mortal enemy (and mortal she would certainly be) in the niece of the sovereign to whom I am assigned." Quite pleased with the way things were turning out, he began to speak reasonably to her.

They would go on, enjoying the most agreeable friendship. Why shouldn't they both be happy? What had either one done to merit reproach? Love would give way to a fine, strong friendship. He would retain the right to come often to this place; their relationship would be a smooth and pleasant one. . . .

At first, the princess did not understand. When she did finally understand, with horror, she remained standing, immobile, her eyes fixed. Finally, at the phrase "smooth and pleasant relationship," she interrupted him with a voice that seemed to be torn from the very bottom of her chest, and she pronounced her words slowly:

"That is to say that, after all, you find me pretty enough to retain as a girl at your service!"

"Oh, my dear, good friend, isn't our reputation perfectly safe?" replied S  nec  , shocked in turn. "How can you possibly complain? Fortunately, no one has any suspicion of our relationship. I am a man of honor; I give you my word that no living soul will ever hear a word about the happiness I have enjoyed."

“Not even L’Orsini?” she asked in a tone so cold that its import escaped the chevalier.

“Have I ever named anyone,” he said naively, “with whom I was in love before I became your devoted slave?”

“Despite my great respect for your word of honor, it is still a risk that I do not choose to run,” said the princess in a resolute voice, which had finally begun to startle the young Frenchman. “Farewell, Chevalier. . . .” And then, when he remained standing there as if undecided, she added, “Come, embrace me. Give me that one grace. Speak seriously; answer me seriously.”

“I swear it.”

“Is your conscience in a good state?”

“Oh, threats!” said the chevalier, stifling a laugh. “Farewell, princess. Personal threats are not the way to reach a Frenchman’s heart. . . .” And then, the ambition within the young diplomat made him add, “I believe you are too generous to try to hurt me through my ambassador.”

“You have absolutely nothing to fear in that regard,” the princess said with an air and a smile dripping with irony. Their embrace was long and silent. He left. “And there goes the happiness that L’Orsini will be enjoying,” the princess said to herself.

“There was an example of determined hatred,” thought the chevalier. “The meeting began so sweetly, and then turned so tedious.” He leaped through the doorway and disappeared.

Monsignor Feraterra shuddered when the princess told him about the interview. “I cannot trust the promises of this princess,” he thought; “I’ll need to compromise her.”

Two days later, the heat had been overwhelming, and so Sénécé

went out to the court to take the air around midnight. There, he found all of Roman high society. When he was ready to get back into his coach, his lackey could barely reply to him: he was drunk; the coach had disappeared; the lackey told him, barely able to get the words out, that the coachman had been in some dispute with an "enemy."

"Ah, so my coachman has 'enemies'!" laughed Sénecé.

Walking back to his lodgings, he was only two or three streets past the Corso when he realized he was being followed. A group of men, some four or five, stopped when he stopped, walked on when he walked on. "I could take a detour and get to the Corso by another street," thought Sénecé. "Bah! These louts aren't worth the trouble; I'm well armed." He had his dagger unsheathed and in his hand.

Thinking thus, he crossed two or three streets more and more solitary and deserted. He could hear the men increasing their pace. He raised his eyes and happened to see right in front of him the walls of a small church through whose windows a remarkably bright light was shining. He hurried to the door, banging on it with the butt of his dagger. The men pursuing him were fifty paces away. They began running toward him now, and at the last moment a monk opened the door; Sénecé hurled himself into the church; the monk lowered the bar and locked the door. At that moment, the men reached the door, knocking and kicking at it. "Ungodly men!" exclaimed the monk. Sénecé gave him a gold sequin. "They were definitely after me," he said.

The church was illuminated by at least a thousand candles.

"What? A service at this hour?" he asked the monk.

"Excellency, we have approval for it from His Eminence the cardinal vicar."

The entire forecourt of the Church of San Francesco a Ripa was

occupied by a magnificent mausoleum; the office of the dead was being chanted.

"Who has died? Some prince?" asked Sénécé.

The priest replied, "Doubtless, because no expense has been spared; but all this is so much silver and wax wasted; our director has told us that the deceased died impenitent."

Sénécé stepped forward; he saw insignia that appeared to be French; his curiosity redoubled; he stepped up close and recognized the arms! There was a Latin inscription:

Nobilis homo Johannes Norbertus Sénécé eques decessit Romae.

"The high and mighty lord Jean Norbert de Sénécé, chevalier, dead in Rome."

"I must be the first man," Sénécé thought, "to have the honor of attending his own funeral. . . . I believe only Charles V was granted this pleasure. . . .⁴ But it isn't safe for me in this church."

He gave a second sequin to the sacristan. "Father," he said, "let me out by a door at the rear of the church."

"Certainly," said the monk.

As soon as he was in the street, Sénécé, who now had a pistol in each hand, began to run as fast as he could. Soon, he could hear his pursuers behind him. As he approached his hotel, he saw the door closed and a man standing in front of it. "This is the moment for attack," the young Frenchman thought; he was preparing to kill the man with a pistol shot when he recognized his valet.

"Open the door!" he cried.

It was opened; they ran in quickly and locked it behind them.

"Ah, monsieur, I've been looking everywhere for you; I have some very sad news: poor Jean, your coachman, was stabbed to death. The princess Campobosso is in an extreme state; the pope has sent the

grand confessor to her.” The valet added, lowering his voice: “They say she was poisoned by the countess Orsini. And they told me at the princess’s house that you had been assassinated.”

“As you can see!” said the chevalier, laughing.

While they were speaking, eight musket shots rang out, breaking through the garden window, laying out both him and the valet. Their bodies had been pierced by more than twenty bullets each.⁵

Excuse the faults of the author. Moral: One must always understand the facts as they are in the country one visits.

PROSPER MÉRIMÉE⁶

***TOO MUCH FAVOR
IS DEADLY***

A T A L E O F 1 5 8 9

Such is the title that a Spanish poet gave to this story, from which he crafted a tragedy. I have taken great care to avoid borrowing any of the ornaments that the Spaniard deployed in trying to embellish this sad picture from the interior of a convent; many of those ornaments would certainly enhance the tale's interest, but, faithful to my intent—which is to make known the simple, passionate people of the sixteenth century, from which springs the civilization of our time—I will present the story without ornament just as one might, assuming one had the proper permissions, be able to read it in the archives of the bishop of ***, where all the original documents can be found, making up the curious tale of Count Buondelmonte.

In a Tuscan town that I will not name, there existed in 1589, and still exists today, a somber, magnificent convent.¹ Its black walls, at least fifty feet tall, make the whole neighborhood a depressing place; these walls form a border along three streets, and on the fourth side the convent garden stretches out all the way to the town's ramparts. The wall encircling the garden is not as high. This abbey, to which we shall give the name Saint Reparata, takes in only girls of the

highest ranks of the nobility. On the twentieth of October 1587, all the abbey's bells were ringing; the church, open to the faithful, was hung with magnificent tapestries of red damask richly fringed with gold. The saintly Sister Virgilia, mistress of Ferdinand I, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, had been named abbess of Saint Reparata the previous evening, and now the local bishop, accompanied by all his clergy, had come to install her formally. The whole town was in such commotion that it was impossible to make your way through the streets near Saint Reparata.

The cardinal Ferdinand de Medici, who had recently succeeded his brother François to the crown—without renouncing the cardinal's hat—was thirty-six years old and had been a cardinal for twenty-five, having been elevated to that great honor at the age of eleven. The reign of François, celebrated even in our time for his love for Bianca Capello, had been marked by all the follies that the love of pleasure can inspire in a prince not particularly noted for strength of character. Ferdinand, for his part, could reproach himself for some of the same kinds of weaknesses as his brother's; his love for the sister oblate Virgilia was widely celebrated in Tuscany, but, it must be added, it was celebrated for its innocence. Given that the Grand Duke François—who was somber, violent, and led entirely by his passions—never imagined there was any scandal in this love, no one ever questioned the virtue of Sister Virgilia. The Order of Oblates, to which she belonged, having given its sisters permission to pass some two-thirds of the year in the homes of their relations, she saw Cardinal de Medici on a daily basis whenever he was in Florence. Two things were subjects of surprised talk in that town given to exquisite pleasures, two things concerning a prince who was young, rich, and given a kind of sanction by the example of his brother: Sis-

ter Virgilia was sweet-natured, shy, and possessed of a remarkable intelligence, but she was by no means pretty; and the young cardinal had seen her only ever in the presence of two or three devout women of the noble Respuccio family—the family to whom belonged that remarkable mistress of the young prince of the blood.

Grand Duke François died on October 19, 1587, in the evening. On the twentieth, before noon, the greatest signors of his court and the richest merchants—for, it must be recalled, the Medici were originally only merchants; their relatives and the most influential persons at their court were still engaged in commerce, which had the effect of preventing their courtiers from being quite as absurd as their peers at other courts—the first-rank courtiers, the richest merchants all came, on that morning of October 20, into the modest house of Sister Oblate Virgilia, who was startled to see such a spectacle.

The new grand duke, Ferdinand, wanted to be good and reasonable, to work for the good of his people, and to these ends he wanted above all to eliminate all intrigue from his court. Upon coming to power, he found that the richest convent in his realm, the one which served as a refuge for all those noble daughters whose parents wanted to sacrifice them to enhance the luster of the family and to which we have given the name of the Abbey of Saint Reparata, currently had no abbess; he named, without hesitation, the woman he loved to the position.

The Abbey of Saint Reparata belonged to the Order of Saint Benedict, the rule of which forbade sisters from leaving their cloister. To the great surprise of the good people of Florence, the prince cardinal did not go to see the new abbess, but, on the other hand, through a sort of delicacy of the heart, which was noted but, we might add, rather criticized by all the women at court, he never

allowed himself to be alone with any woman. While he conducted himself in this manner, the courtiers' attentions would turn to seek out Sister Virgilia, even in her convent, and they thought that they could see, despite her extreme modesty, that she was not averse to this attention, the only kind that the virtue of the new sovereign would permit.

The Convent of Saint Reparata had often had to deal with affairs of an extremely delicate nature: those young daughters of the richest families in Florence did not allow themselves to be exiled from the brilliant society of so rich a city, of that city which was then the very capital of European commerce, without casting a regretful gaze upon that which they had to leave behind; often, they complained at the tops of their voices of the injustice of their parents, and sometimes they sought out the consolations of love, and so it sometimes happened that the hatreds and rivalries of the convent came to roil the higher society of Florence. One result of this state of things was that the abbess of Saint Reparata had frequent audiences with the reigning grand duke. In order to effect the least possible violation of the rule of Saint Benedict, the grand duke would send one of his carriages with two of the ladies from his court in it, and they would accompany the abbess right up to the audience chamber in the grand duke's palace on the great Via Larga. The two "enclosure witnesses," as they were called, would take their places on chairs next to the door while the abbess went in alone to speak to the prince, who awaited her at the far end of the chamber so that the enclosure witnesses could hear nothing of what passed in this conference.

At other times, the prince would go to the Church of Saint Reparata; the choir grillwork would be opened for him, and the abbess would come out to speak with His Highness.

Neither of these two methods of audience was satisfactory to the grand duke; indeed, they may have fanned the flames of certain feelings that he wished to allow to fade away. And affairs of a quite delicate nature never failed to arise at the Convent of Saint Reparata: the tender sentiments of Sister Félice degli Almieri were the latest to disturb the tranquillity of the place. The Almieri family was one of the most powerful and richest in Florence. Two of the brothers—for whose sake the young Félice was sacrificed—having recently died and the third remaining childless, the family believed themselves to be suffering some affliction from heaven. The mother and the surviving brother sent Félice, despite the vow of poverty she had taken, little presents, some of the goods of which she had been deprived in order to stoke the vanity of her brothers.

The Convent of Saint Reparata had at this time forty-three sisters. Each of them had her own maid, her *camériste noble*: these were young women who came from the ranks of impoverished nobility; they ate at a separate table and received one ecu per month from the convent treasurer for their expenses. But because of a singular custom, one that was not favorable to the peace of the convent, no one could be a *camériste noble* after thirty years of age; having arrived at that stage of life, these girls either married or were admitted into the sisterhood in the convents of some inferior order.

The most noble ladies of Saint Reparata could have up to five maids, but Sister Félice degli Almieri claimed she had the right to eight. All of the more gallant sisters, and these numbered fifteen or sixteen, supported the claims of Félice, whereas the twenty-six others made a show of being profoundly scandalized and spoke among themselves of appealing to the prince.

The good Sister Virgilia, the new abbess, by no means had the

kind of mind suited to adjudicating such serious business; the two parties seemed to demand that she submit the matter to the prince.

Already at court, all the friends of the Almieri family were beginning to talk, saying how strange it was that anyone would want to deprive a daughter of such high birth, and especially one who had been so barbarously sacrificed by her family, of making whatever use she chose of her fortune, especially when the usage was so innocent. On the other side, the families of the older sisters and those less rich did not fail to point out that it was at the least quite singular to see a sister who had taken a vow of poverty unable to content herself with five maids.

The grand duke wanted to cut this annoyance off quickly, as it had the potential to drag the whole city into the debate. His ministers pressed him to have an audience with the abbess of Saint Reparata, and since that young woman, with her celestial virtue and her fine character, would probably not deign to take her attention away from heavenly things and apply it to such a miserable scuffle, the grand duke could simply communicate his decision to her and she would carry it out. "But how am I supposed to make a decision," the prince quite reasonably asked himself, "if I know nothing of what it is that makes the two sides so determined?" Moreover, he by no means wanted to make an enemy of the powerful Almieri family without good reason.

The prince had Count Buondelmonte as an intimate friend; the count was one year younger, that is to say, he was thirty-five. They had known each other since the cradle, having had the same nurse, a rich and beautiful peasant woman from Casentino. Count Buondelmonte, very rich, very noble, and one of the handsomest men in the city, was remarkable for his air of indifference and the coldness of his

character. He had rejected the plea to become the chief minister, which Grand Duke Ferdinand had made to him on the first day he arrived in Florence.

"If I were in your place," the count had said to him, "I would abdicate at once. Imagine it: why would I want to be minister to a prince and stir up the hatred of half the population of the city where I live!"

Amid the discomforts that the grand duke felt at court because of the dissension about the Convent of Saint Reparata, he thought he would turn to his friend the count. The latter was spending his time on his estate, overseeing the management of his lands with great seriousness. Every day, he spent two hours hunting or fishing, depending on the weather, and he was never known to have a mistress. He was highly annoyed at the prince's letter telling him to come to Florence, and he was even more so when he learned that the prince wanted to make him director of the Convent of Saint Reparata.

"I would almost rather be the chief minister to Your Highness," the count said to him. "Peace of mind is the one thing I value most, and now you want me to put myself into the middle of this flock of enraged sheep?"

"What made me think of you, my friend, is that everyone knows that no woman has ever dominated your heart for so much as a day; I am far from being able to claim that happiness; I am always on the point of falling into the kind of follies that my brother committed over Bianca Capello."

At this point, the prince confided intimately to his friend—knowing that doing so would win him over.

"You must know," he said, "that if I see that sweet girl again, the one I made abbess of Saint Reparata, I will no longer answer for myself."

"And what would be so bad about that?" replied the count. "If it would make you happy to take a mistress, why not go ahead and take one? The only reason I don't is that every woman, before three days are out, ends up boring me with her gossip and all the little pettinesses of her character."

"I am a cardinal," said the grand duke. "It is true that the pope has given me permission to resign the red hat and get married, in consideration of the crown that I have come to; but I really don't want to burn in hell, and if I marry, I'll have to choose a woman I don't love at all, just one who will provide successors to the crown, and I will not enjoy the ordinary pleasures of marriage."

"I have nothing to say to all that," replied the count. "I do not believe that the all-powerful God would ever lower his gaze to such miseries. Just see to it that your subjects are happy and good, decent people, and then if you like, go on and have thirty-six mistresses."

"I don't want to have even one," replied the prince with a laugh, "and that's why I'll be in such danger if I go to see the abbess of Saint Reparata again. She is both the best girl in the world and the one least capable of governing even some little group of wise, pious, elderly devotees, much less a convent full of young girls taken away from the world against their own wishes."

The prince revealed so deep a fear of seeing Sister Virgilia that the count was touched. As he thought about the prince, he said to himself, "If he fails to keep the kind of vow he made, even though the pope gave him permission to marry, he's capable of feeling unhappy for the rest of his life." The next day, he went to the Convent of Saint Reparata, where he was received with all the honors and all the curiosity due to a new representative of the prince. Ferdinand I had sent one of his ministers to the abbess and the nuns to declare that affairs

of state no longer permitted him to give his attention to their convent and that therefore he had placed full authority in Count Buondelmonte, whose decisions were to be final.

After his first audience with the good abbess, the count was scandalized at the prince's bad taste: she had no common sense and was hardly even pretty. As for the nuns who wanted to prevent Félize degli Almieri from taking on two new chambermaids, the count found them quite malicious. He had Félize called to the visiting room. She sent an impertinent reply that she did not have time, which amused the count, who was up till then tired of his mission and regretting that he had agreed to it for the prince.

He said that he would like to speak to the chambermaids just as much as to Félize herself, and he sent for five of them to come to the visiting room. Only three came, declaring in the name of their mistress that she could not do without the presence of the other two, upon which the count, making use of his rights as the representative of the prince, had two of his men go into the convent and bring the two recalcitrant maids to him, and he amused himself for an hour listening to the chatter of those five young, pretty girls, who all tended to talk at the same time. It was only then, through what they revealed without knowing it, that the prince's representative began to understand what was going on in this convent. Only five or six of the nuns were old; twenty, though young, were devout, but all the others, young and pretty, had lovers in the city. Of course they could see them only rarely. But how did they manage to see them? The count did not want to ask this of the chambermaids of Félize, but he swore to himself that he would find out soon by placing spies around the convent.

He learned, to his great surprise, that intimate friendships formed among the nuns, and that these were the major cause of all the hatreds

and internal dissension. For example, Félice had Rodelinde de P*** as a close friend; Céliane, the most beautiful one in the convent after Félice, was best friends with the young Fabienne. Each of these women held her *camériste noble* in greater or lesser favor. For example, Martona, the *camériste noble* of the abbess, had gained her favor by being even more devout than she was. She would pray on her knees next to the abbess for five or six hours every day—but, according to the chambermaids, those hours seemed awfully long to her.

The count learned, moreover, that Rodéric and Lancelot were the names of two of the women's lovers, apparently of Félice and Rodelinde, though he did not want to raise the question directly.

The hour he spent with the maids did not seem long at all to him, but to Félice, it seemed eternal; she saw her dignity being outraged by this representative of the prince, who was depriving her, at one fell swoop, of the services of all five of her maids. She could not endure it, and, straining to hear the considerable volume of chatter coming from the visiting room, she burst in, even though her dignity warned her that appearing like this, clearly inflamed by a transport of impatience, might make her appear ridiculous, particularly after having refused the official invitation of the prince's envoy. "But I'll be taking this little man down a peg," Félice, the most imperious of women, said to herself. She thus burst into the visiting room and, barely acknowledging the prince's envoy, she ordered one of her maids to follow her.

"Madame, if this girl obeys you, I will have my men go back into the convent and immediately bring her back here to me."

"I shall take her by the hand, and will your men dare to do me violence?"

“My men will bring both her and you back here to the visiting room, madame.”

“And me?”

“And you yourself, and if I feel like it, I shall have you carried away from this convent, and you can continue to labor for your salvation in some poor little convent up on the summit of some mountain in the Apennines. I can do that—and many other things as well.”

The count noticed that the five maids had all gone pale; even the cheeks of Félice herself had taken on a pale cast that only made her more beautiful.

The count said to himself, “This is without a doubt the most beautiful person I have seen in my entire life. I have to make this scene last.”

And in fact it lasted for three-quarters of an hour. During that time, Félice demonstrated a spirit and, more importantly, a hauteur of character that hugely amused the prince’s envoy. By the end of the conference, when the tone of the conversation had mellowed, it seemed to the count that Félice was rather less pretty.

“She has to be put into a fury,” he thought. He reminded her that she had taken a vow of obedience, and if in the future she showed even the slightest resistance to the commands of the prince that he was charged with bringing to the convent, he thought it would be a good thing for her salvation if she were to be sent to spend six months in one of the dullest convents in the Apennines.

At this, Félice became superb in her rage. She told him that the holy martyrs had suffered more than that from the Roman emperors.

“I am not an emperor, madame, just as those holy martyrs did not put their entire society into an uproar over having two additional maids, when they already had five as amiable as these young ladies.”

He bowed coldly and left without giving her the chance to reply, leaving her furious.

The count remained in Florence and did not return to his estates, being curious to know what was really going on in the Convent of Saint Reparata. The observers given him by the grand duke's police, who had been stationed around the convent and its immense gardens, were quick to tell him everything they knew. Rodéric L***, one of the richest and most dissipated young men in town, was the lover of Félize, and her friend Rodelinde was making love with Lancelot P***, a young man who had greatly distinguished himself in Florence's war against Pisa. These young men had surmounted great difficulties in order to get into the convent. The severity of the rule there had redoubled, or rather, the old laxness had been suppressed since Ferdinand had ascended to the throne of the grand duke. The abbess Virgilia was anxious for the rule to be followed in all its strictness, but her abilities and her character were not a match for her good intentions, and the observers reporting to the count informed him that there rarely passed a whole month without Rodéric, Lancelot, and two or three other young men with relationships within the convent succeeding in getting in to see their mistresses. The great size of the gardens of the convent had obliged the bishop to tolerate the existence of two doors that opened onto the deserted space behind the rampart, to the north of the city. The nuns who were faithful to their duties—and they were the great majority of the convent—knew these details far less well than the count did, but they suspected something of the kind and made use of the existence of such abuses to excuse their failing to obey the orders of the abbess when it suited them.

The count could see clearly that it would not be at all easy to restore order in this convent so long as a woman as weak as the abbess

was in charge. He said as much to the grand duke, who told him to go ahead and use the utmost severity, but at the same time he did not seem disposed to have his old love transferred to some other convent on account of her lack of ability.

The count returned to Saint Reparata determined to use the greatest rigor in order to get himself quit of the chore he had been foolish enough to take on. Félice, for her part, still stinging from the manner in which the count had spoken to her, was determined to profit from their very first talk together by regaining and using the haughty tone that suited a member of her family and her position in the world. Upon his arrival at the convent, the count had Félice sent for at once, in order to get through the most difficult part of the chore first. As for Félice, she arrived at the visiting room already throbbing with the greatest indignation, but the count found her very beautiful, being something of a connoisseur in this genre. "Before we disturb this superb physiognomy," he said to himself, "let's take the time to gaze upon it fully." Félice wondered at the rational and cool tone of this man who, wearing the entirely black suit that he had thought best to wear, given the tasks he had before him at the convent, was really quite remarkable. "I had thought," Félice said to herself, "that since he was over thirty-five he would be a ridiculous old man like our confessors, but I find on the contrary a man truly worthy of the name. He doesn't wear those exaggerated outfits that in fact make up most of Rodéric's attraction, and that of the other young men I have known; he is much inferior to them in terms of the quantity of velour and golden ornaments, but if he wanted to, he could in an instant assume that sort of merit, whereas the others, I think, would be hard put to imitate the wise, reasonable, and genuinely interesting conversation of Count Buondelmonte."

Although very careful to avoid anything that might irritate her, the count was far from ceding to her on every point, as had every other man who had had any relations with that so lovely girl with so imperious a character, and he knew of her lovers. Because the count was a man without any pretention, he was simple and natural with her; he avoided going into detail only on the topics that would arouse her anger. But still, he had to confront the demands of the proud nun; the subject of the disorders at the convent was raised.

“In fact, madame, the cause of all the trouble here is the claim, perhaps justifiable up to a certain point, of having two maids more than the others, and this has placed one of the most remarkable persons in this convent at the center of things.”

“The cause of all the trouble here is the weak character of our abbess, who wants to treat us with an absolutely new severity that none of us had ever heard of before. There may well be convents full of genuinely pious women who love their isolation and who have always dreamed of taking vows of poverty and obedience, etc., etc., ever since they were seventeen; but as for us, our families have placed us here in order to give all the wealth of the house to our brothers. The only vocation we had was our inability to flee and go live somewhere other than a convent, since our fathers will no longer receive us in their palazzos. And anyway, when we had taken those vows that are so obviously null and void in the eyes of any rational person, we had already been pensioners in the convent for one or several years, and each of us thought we would enjoy the same degree of liberty that we had seen in the nuns of our time. Now, I can tell you, mon-sieur envoy, the gate to the rampart was open till dawn, and all of these women saw their lovers in complete liberty within the garden. Nobody even dreamed of criticizing this mode of life, and we all

thought, becoming nuns, we would have a life as happy as those of our sisters whom the avarice of our families allowed to marry. Everything has changed, it is true, since we have had a prince who was a cardinal for twenty-five years of his life. Monsieur envoy, you can have soldiers or even servants brought into the convent, as you did the other day. They can do violence, as your servants did violence to my women, and they can do that for one single, grand reason—that they are stronger than them. But your pride should not make you think you have any rights over us. We were brought here to this convent by force, where we were forced to swear and take vows at the age of sixteen; and, finally, the miserable way of life you want us to submit to is not at all the one we saw the nuns practicing here when we took our vows, and, even supposing those vows were legitimate, we were vowing to live as they did, and now you want us to live in a way they never knew. I will admit, monsieur envoy, that I desire the esteem of my fellows here. During the days of the republic, they would not have allowed this horrible oppression to be exercised on poor girls who have done no wrong beyond having been born to rich families with sons. I would like the chance to be able to say all this in public, or to a reasonable man. As for the number of my maids, I do not care that much. Two, and not five or seven, would be all I need; I could persist in demanding seven until such time as someone took the trouble to do away with the absurdities that are victimizing us, such as the ones I have described. But because your habit of black velour suits you so well, monsieur envoy, I declare to you that I renounce, for this year, the right to have as many domestics as I can afford to pay.”

Count Buondelmonte was much amused by this sustained outcry; he made it last longer by making the most foolish objections one could imagine. Félize responded to them with fiery charm. The count could

see in her eyes all the astonishment the twenty-year-old girl felt in hearing such absurdities coming from the mouth of a man who seemed so reasonable in appearance.

The count took his leave of Félize, had the abbess sent for and gave her some sage advice, announced to the prince that the turmoil at the Saint Reparata Convent was now calmed, received many compliments on his deep wisdom, and, finally, returned to farming on his estates. But from time to time he said to himself, "So there actually exists a twenty-year-old girl who would be considered the most beautiful person in the whole city if she were to move in society, and whose thinking in no way resembles that of a doll."

But great events were taking place in the convent. Not all the nuns thought things through as clearly as Félize had, and most of the young ones were bored to death. Their only consolation was in drawing caricatures and writing satirical sonnets against a prince who, after having spent twenty-five years as a cardinal, could, upon succeeding to the throne, find nothing better to do than hide his beloved away as an abbess and oppress poor young girls who had been thrown into the convent by their greedy parents.

As we have said, the lovely Rodelinde was Félize's intimate friend. Their friendship had doubled in strength when Félize had confided to her that, ever since her conversations with Count Buondelmonte, that old man who was over thirty-six, her lover Rodéric had come to seem a rather boring creature. To put the matter in as few words as possible, Félize had fallen in love with the serious count; the constant conversations she had on the subject with her friend Rodelinde sometimes lasted until two or three in the morning. Now, according to the rule of Saint Benedict, which the abbess was seeking to reestablish in all its strictness, every nun was supposed to be in bed one hour after

sundown, at the sound of a certain bell that called them to their rest. The good abbess, wishing to provide a good example, never failed to close herself up in her room as soon as the bell sounded, thinking piously that all the other nuns were following her example. Among the prettiest and the richest of these women were Fabienne, nineteen years old and perhaps the most scatterbrained girl in the whole convent, and her close friend, Céliane. Both of them were angry with Félice, who, they said to themselves, treated them with contempt. The fact was that ever since Félice had had so interesting a subject for conversation with Rodelinde, she could not disguise her impatience well, or at all, when it came to the other nuns. She was the prettiest, the richest, and clearly the smartest of all of them. It does not take much, in a convent steeped in boredom, to ignite a great hatred. Fabienne, with her excitability, went to tell the abbess that Félice and Rodelinde sometimes stayed out in the garden until two in the morning. The abbess had got the count to leave her one of the prince's soldiers to be placed as a guard at the door of the garden, the door that opened up onto the dark space beyond the north rampart. She had enormous locks put on this door, and every night, the youngest of the gardeners—an old man of sixty—on coming to the end of the working day, brought the key to the abbess. She then sent an old portress, detested by the nuns, to lock the second lock. But despite all these precautions, staying out in the garden until two in the morning was a very great crime in her eyes. She sent for Félice and treated that noble daughter, now the heir of her family, with a haughty tone that she perhaps would never have permitted herself if she were not sure of the prince's favor. Félice was all the more wounded by the bitterness of her reproaches because ever since she had met the count, she had met her lover Rodéric only once, and that was only to make fun of him. In

her indignation, she grew eloquent, and although the abbess refused to say who had denounced her, it was easy enough for Félize to determine that she owed all this to Fabienne.

Félize resolved immediately upon vengeance. The resolution calmed her soul, which had been strengthened by this misfortune.

“Do you know, madame,” she said to the abbess, “that I deserve your pity? I have been deprived of all my peace of mind. It was a real wisdom in our founder, Saint Benedict, that led him to forbid any man under sixty ever being allowed into our convents. Monsieur Count Buondelmonte, the grand duke’s viceroy in charge of our convent, needed to have long conversations with me to dissuade me from the mad idea I had of increasing the number of my maids. He was wise, and he combined an admirable mind with an infinite prudence. I was struck, and more so than a servant of God and of Saint Benedict should have been, by these fine qualities of the count, our viceroy. Heaven has chosen to punish my vanity: I have fallen hopelessly in love with the count; at the risk of scandalizing my friend Rodelinde, I have confided in her all about my passion, which is as criminal as it is involuntary; and it is because she has given me her counsel and her consolation, because sometimes she has even succeeded in helping me resist the temptations of the evil spirit, that sometimes she has stayed up late with me. But it was always because I entreated her to; I know very well that if Rodelinde had quit me, I would have turned to thoughts of the count.”

The abbess did not fail to deliver a lengthy sermon to this strayed lamb. Félize was careful to voice some reflections, which lengthened the homily.

“Now,” she thought, “the things that will bring about our vengeance, Rodelinde’s and mine, will also bring the amiable count back

to the convent. I will thus be able to repair the mistake I made in giving in too easily on the point about the number of maids. I was seduced, though I did not know it at the time, by the temptation to appear reasonable to a man who was himself so very reasonable. I will not let slip any chance there is of getting him to return to take up his post as viceroy over our convent. This is what bothers me most right now. That little toy Rodéric, who used to amuse me, now seems only ridiculous to me, and through my own fault I have been unable to see the amiable count again. It's up to us from now on, Rodelinde and me, to ensure that our vengeance creates the kind of disorders that will make his presence here necessary. Our abbess is so unable to keep a secret that it is quite possible that she will try to prevent or abbreviate as much as she can any conversations I am able to have with him, and to do this she will tell him, I have no doubt, that onetime mistress of the cardinal grand duke, about my declaration of love for that singular, cold man. It will be a comical scene and it will perhaps amuse him, because, unless I am mistaken, he is not the kind to be fooled by the nonsense they preach at us; it is only that he has not yet found a woman worthy of him, and I will be that woman—or I will die.”

And now the boredom that had harassed Félize and Rodelinde was chased away by their schemes for vengeance, which occupied their every moment.

“Because Fabienne and Céliane have wickedly chosen to spend time in the garden during the hot weather, the very next meeting they have with their lovers must make such a horrific scandal that it will wipe my late-night walks there entirely out of the minds of the serious ladies here in the convent. The evening of the first rendezvous that Fabienne and Céliane give to Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine, Rodéric and Lancelot will station themselves behind those cut stones that are

set up in that little area right in front of the door to the garden. Rodéric and Lancelot must not kill the women's lovers but should give them each five or six little stabs with their swords, so that the two are covered in blood. The sight of them will alarm their mistresses and give them something to think about beyond the sweet nothings they were going to say to them."

The two friends thought the best way to set up the ambush they had planned was to ask the abbess to grant a month's leave for Livia, the *camériste noble* of Rodelinde. This most skillful girl was given letters for Rodéric and Lancelot. She also brought them a sum of money, which they used to set spies upon Lorenzo B*** and Pierre-Antoine D***, the lover of Céliane. These two young men, the noblest and most fashionable in the city, entered the convent on the same night. This had become a much more difficult thing to manage under the reign of the cardinal grand duke. Moreover, the abbess Virgilia had obtained a guard from Count Buondelmonte, stationed by the service door of the garden, the one that opened onto the deserted area behind the north rampart.

Livia, the *camériste noble*, came back every day to report to Félize and Rodelinde on the preparations for the planned attack on the lovers of Céliane and Fabienne. The preparations took no less than six weeks. It was now a matter of guessing which night Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine would choose for entering the convent; under the new regime, with all its strictness, prudence was doubly necessary for such business. And Livia was having great difficulty with Rodéric. He had perceived Félize's attitude toward him growing lukewarm and now was refusing outright to get involved in taking vengeance on the lovers of Fabienne and Céliane unless she agreed to meet with him in person and tell him herself. Now, consenting to this was precisely

what Félize, fully occupied with thoughts of Count Buondelmonte, would never do.

"I can understand perfectly well," she wrote to him with an imprudent frankness,

how one might let oneself be damned in order to find happiness; but to let oneself be damned in order to see a previous lover whose reign is over—that is something I cannot understand at all. Nevertheless, I could receive you one more night in order to make you see reason, but it is not a crime I am asking of you. Thus, you have no right to be making exaggerated claims and asking to be paid as if someone had asked you to kill someone who had been insolent. Do not commit the error of giving the lovers of our enemies such serious wounds that they are unable to get themselves into the garden so as to be a spectacle for all of the women we will have assembled there. Do not do something that might reduce the spice of our vengeance; I see in you only a kind of scatterbrain, unworthy of inspiring the slightest confidence. And you must know that it is primarily for this mortal failing in you that you have ceased to merit my friendship.

Finally, the long-planned night of vengeance arrived. Rodéric and Lancelot, with the aid of several of their men, kept an eye on the movements of Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine all day long. Certain indiscretions that the latter two let fall made it clear that this was the night they would try to scale the walls of Saint Reparata. A rich merchant whose house was next door to the guardhouse that had furnished the sentry for the nuns' garden gate was hosting his daughter's wedding that night. Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine, disguised as servants of the rich man's house, took advantage of the situation by coming to the guardhouse, around ten o'clock in the evening, and offering

them a cask of wine in the merchant's name. The soldiers did full honors to the gift. The night was very dark, and scaling of the convent wall was to take place at midnight; at eleven o'clock, Rodéric and Lancelot, hidden near the wall, were delighted to see the sentry relieved by a soldier who was more than half drunk and who fell sound asleep within a few minutes.

Within the convent, Félice and Rodelinde had watched their enemies hiding themselves in the garden under the trees that grew next to the wall. A little before midnight, Félice felt emboldened enough to go and wake up the abbess. She had some difficulty in doing so; and she had even more in trying to make her comprehend the nature of the crime she had come to report. At last, after more than a half hour of time lost, during the last minutes of which Félice trembled at the thought of passing for a slanderer, the abbess declared that if in fact the story was true, there was no need to add an infraction of the rule of Saint Benedict to a crime. Now, that rule strictly forbade setting foot in the garden after sunset. Happily, Félice recalled that one could come through the interior of the convent and, without setting foot in the garden, could watch from the terrace of a little, low orangery right beside the door guarded by the sentry. While Félice was busy persuading the abbess, Rodelinde went and awakened her aunt, an old and very pious subprioress in the convent.

The abbess, even while allowing herself to be led to the terrace of the orangery, was still far from believing what Félice was telling her. Thus, it is hard to imagine her surprise, her indignation, her stupor when she saw, nine or ten feet below the terrace, two nuns out of their rooms at that unheard-of hour—for in the darkness she could not yet recognize Fabienne and Céliane.

“You impious girls!” she cried in a voice that she hoped was imposing. “You imprudent, wicked creatures! Is this how you serve the Divine Majesty? Remember that the great Saint Benedict, your protector, is watching you now from the heavens above, and he shudders at the sight of your sacrilegious flouting of his rule. Get back inside, because the bell for retiring has sounded long ago; get back into your rooms as fast as you can, and set yourselves to pray as you await the penance I will impose upon you in the morning.”

Who could paint the stupefaction and the chagrin that overwhelmed the souls of Céliane and Fabienne upon hearing the voice of the angry abbess coming from so close, just above their heads? They stopped talking and stood absolutely still while yet another surprise unfolded before their and the abbess’s eyes. They could hear, some ten steps away and on the other side of the gate, the violent sounds of a combat with swords. Soon, the wounded combatants cried out; someone was hurt. Imagine the misery of Céliane and Fabienne when they recognized the voices of Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine! They had counterfeit keys for the garden gate, and now they rushed to open the locks, and though the door was very large, they had the strength to make it turn on its hinges. Céliane, who was the stronger and the older of the two, dared to leave the garden first. She returned a moment later supporting her love Lorenzo in her arms; he seemed dangerously wounded and could barely stand up. He moaned at every step like a man about to die, and in fact, after he had made scarcely a dozen steps into the garden and despite all the efforts of Céliane, he fell and died almost at once. Céliane, abandoning all prudence, called out his name aloud and burst into sobs as she saw he was no longer responding.

All this took place about twenty paces from the terrace of the little orangery. Félize could clearly see that Lorenzo was either dead or dying, and it would be difficult to paint her despair.

"I am the cause of all this," she said to herself. "Rodéric must have let himself get carried away, and he must have killed Lorenzo. He has a cruel nature, with a vanity that never pardons an insult, and at a number of masquerade parties Lorenzo's hair and clothes were considered finer than his."

Félize supported the abbess, who had nearly fainted in horror.

A few seconds later, the unlucky Fabienne came into the garden supporting her lover, Pierre-Antoine, he, too, pierced and mortally wounded. He, too, was soon to die, but from within the silence that this scene of horror had inspired in all of them, he could be heard saying something to Fabienne:

"It was Don César, the knight of Malta. I recognized him perfectly, and though he wounded me, he is also bearing wounds from me."

Don César had been Pierre-Antoine's predecessor with Fabienne. Now, the young nun seemed to have lost all concern for her reputation; she called aloud for help from the Madonna and her patron saint, and she also called out for her *camériste noble*; she didn't care if she woke the whole convent, because in fact she had really been in love with Pierre-Antoine. She wanted to care for him, stanch his bleeding, bandage his wounds. This genuine passion aroused pity in many of the nuns. Some approached the wounded man, and some went to bring lights; he was seated, leaned up against a laurel tree. Fabienne was on her knees before him, caring for him. He was speaking clearly, repeating again how it had been Don César, the knight of

Malta, who had wounded him, when suddenly his arms stiffened and he expired.

Céliane interrupted the grieving of Fabienne. Once she was certain of Lorenzo's death, she seemed to have forgotten him and now thought only of the peril surrounding her and her dear Fabienne. The latter had fainted and fallen onto the body of her lover. Céliane pulled her up and shook her vigorously to bring her back to herself.

"Your death and mine are certain if you give in to this weakness," she said to her quietly, her mouth pressed against her ear so as not to be overheard by the abbess, whom she could distinctly make out leaning against the balustrade of the orangery, ten or twelve feet above the ground of the garden. "Pull yourself together," she told her, "and think about your reputation and your safety! You'll spend long years in a prison, in some dark and dirty cell, if you give in to your grief for one more moment."

Just then, the abbess, who had been trying to come down, approached the two unfortunate nuns, leaning on Félize's arm.

"As for you, madame," Céliane said to her in a proud, firm tone that made an impression on the abbess, "if you value the peace and honor of this noble convent you hold so dear, you will keep quiet and not make a big scandal out of this for the grand duke. You have been in love yourself, but people say that you have been wise about it, and this gives you a certain superiority over us; but if you speak one word of this to the grand duke, it will immediately be the only topic of conversation in the city, and people will say that the abbess of Saint Reparata, who knew love in the early part of her life, did not have the strength necessary to rule the nuns at her convent. We will be lost, madame, but you will be lost even more certainly than us. Admit,

madame,” she continued, as the abbess was sighing and emitting little confused sounds and cries that could be overheard, “that you don’t know yourself right now what to do to effect either the convent’s salvation or your own!”

The abbess remaining confused and quiet, Céliane went on:

“First, you must be quiet, and then, the essential thing is immediately to get these two dead bodies taken far from here; they will be the end of us, of us and of you, if they are discovered.”

The poor abbess, sighing deeply, was so troubled that she did not know how to respond. She had only Félize next to her, and the latter had prudently stepped away after having led her to the two unfortunate nuns, not wanting them to recognize her.

“My daughters, do what you think necessary, whatever seems right to you,” the miserable abbess said, her voice almost choked with horror at the situation in which she found herself. “I will find a way to cover up our shame, but remember that Divine Justice is always watching over our sins.”

Céliane paid no attention to the words of the abbess.

“Find a way to keep yourself quiet, madame; that’s all we ask of you,” she said repeatedly, interrupting her. Then addressing herself to Martona, the confidante of the abbess, who had just arrived:

“Come help me, my dear friend! This is for the honor of the whole convent, for the honor and even the life of the abbess; for if she speaks, not only will she lose us but also our noble families will not let us perish without seeking vengeance.”

Fabienne was leaning against an olive tree and sobbing, in no state to help Céliane and Martona.

Céliane said to her, “Go back into your room. And take care to

get rid of every trace of blood on your clothes. In an hour, I'll be back, and I'll weep with you."

Then, with Martona's help, Céliane first carried the body of her love and then that of Pierre-Antoine into the street of the gold merchants, situated about ten minutes down the road from the garden gate. Céliane and her companion were lucky enough to be recognized by no one. And by another stroke of luck, which we have already noted and without which none of their endeavors would have been possible, the sentry was seated on a rock some distance away, apparently asleep. Céliane made sure of this first, before attempting to transport the corpses. But after dropping off the second one, Céliane and her companion were struck with fear. The night had grown a little less dark; it might have been about two in the morning; they could distinctly see three soldiers standing at the garden gate, and what was even worse, the gate appeared to be closed.

"There is the first mistake our abbess made," Céliane said to Martona. "She must have remembered that the rule of Saint Benedict called for the garden gate to be closed. We will have to flee to our families, and with this severe and somber prince we have, I might very well lose my life over this affair. But you, Martona, you're guilty of nothing; at my command you helped me transport those corpses, whose presence would have dishonored the convent. Let's kneel down over here behind these rocks."

Two soldiers approached them, returning from the garden gate to the guardhouse. Céliane observed with pleasure that they both seemed completely drunk. They were talking, but the one who had stood sentry, who was noticeable for his great height, was saying nothing at all to his companion of the events of the night; and later, in the

trial that took place, he said simply that some armed men, dressed in superb clothing, had gotten into a fight some paces away from him. In the darkness, he could make out seven or eight men, but he took care not to get involved in their quarrel; after that, everyone had gone into the convent garden.

When the two soldiers had passed, Céliane and her companion approached the garden gate and found to their great joy that it was not entirely closed. This sage precaution had been the work of Félice. When she left the abbess, in order not to be seen by Céliane and Fabienne, she had run over to the garden gate, then completely open. She was mortally afraid that Rodéric would seize upon the moment to come in and try to see her. Knowing his imprudence and his audacity, and fearing that he might try to compromise her to avenge himself on her for her weakening affections, Félice remained hiding behind the door, behind the trees. She had heard everything that Céliane had said to the abbess and then to Martona, and it had been she who had pushed the gate almost closed a few moments after Céliane and Martona had carried out the corpse and she had heard the soldiers come to relieve the sentry.

Félice watched Céliane lock the gate with the counterfeit key and leave. Only then did she quit the garden. "So there it is," she said to herself, "this revenge that I thought would give me so much pleasure." She spent the rest of the night with Rodelinde, trying to understand what must have happened to have brought about such a tragic result.

Fortunately, shortly after dawn, her *camériste noble* returned to the convent bearing a letter for her from Rodéric. Rodéric and Lancelot had been too brave to make use of any of the paid assassins then very common in Florence. They attacked Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine alone. The duels had been long, because Rodéric and Lancelot

wanted to follow their instructions faithfully and give the others only light wounds, and so they fell back constantly; and in fact they had wounded them only in their arms, being perfectly sure they could not die of those wounds. But just when they were about to leave, they saw to their great surprise a furious swordsman falling upon Pierre-Antoine. From the cries he made as he attacked, they recognized Don César, the knight of Malta. Seeing they were now three against two wounded men, they hurried to flee the scene, and the next morning there was astonishment all through Florence at the discovery of the corpses of those two young men, who had been of the first rank of the city's rich and elegant youth. It was their rank that made it so surprising, because under the dissolute reign of François, whom Ferdinand had lately succeeded, all of Tuscany had been like some province in Spain, and there were more than a hundred murders in the city every year. The great question debated everywhere in the higher levels of society was whether Lorenzo and Pierre-Antoine had killed each other in a duel or whether they had been the victims of some revenge plot.

The day after all this, everything was quiet in the convent. The great majority of the nuns had no idea of anything that had happened. Shortly after dawn, before the gardeners arrived, Martona went out and raked up the dirt in the spots where it had been soaked in blood, destroying every trace of what had happened there. This woman, who had a lover herself, carried Céliane's orders out with considerable intelligence and without, above all, saying a word to the abbess. Céliane gave her a gift, a pretty cross with diamonds on it. Martona was a simple woman, and as she thanked her, she added:

"There's one thing I would prefer to all the diamonds in the world. Ever since this new abbess has come to the convent, and no matter

how I've abased myself in currying favor with her by doing every kind of servile task, I haven't been able to get the slightest concession out of her that would have made it easier for me to see my dear Julien R***. Now, it's been more than four months since I've seen him, and he'll probably forget me. Madame's close friend, signora Fabienne, is one of the eight portress sisters; one good turn deserves another. Perhaps Madame Fabienne could, one day when she is in charge of the door, let me slip out to see Julien, or let him come in?"

"I'll do what I can," said Céliane, "but the problem, as Fabienne will no doubt say, is arranging things so the abbess does not perceive your absence. You've made her too accustomed to having you near her at all times. Try to absent yourself for short periods. I am certain that if you were attached to anyone other than the abbess, Fabienne would have no trouble in seeing you get what you're asking for."

It was not without design that Céliane spoke thus.

"You spend all your time weeping for your lover," she said to Fabienne, "but you don't spare a thought for the terrifying menace facing us. Our abbess is incapable of keeping her mouth shut, and sooner or later what has happened is bound to be communicated to our severe grand duke. He has carried the ideas of a man who was a cardinal for twenty-five years with him onto the throne. Our crime is one of the greatest that can be committed in the eyes of religion: in a word, the life of the abbess is the death of us."

"What are you saying?" Fabienne cried, wiping away her tears.

"I am saying that you must ask your friend Victoire Ammanati to give you a little of that famous Perugian poison that her mother passed on to her on her deathbed, having been poisoned herself by her husband. Her illness had lasted several months, and few people suspected poison; it will be the same with our abbess."

“Your idea is horrifying!” exclaimed the sweet Fabienne.

“I understand your horror, and I would share in it if it weren’t that the life of the abbess means the death of Fabienne and Céliane. Think about it: our madame abbess is utterly incapable of keeping quiet; a word from her will be enough to persuade the grand duke, and he has a horror of the crimes that took place when our poor convents enjoyed their freedom. Your cousin is closely connected to Martona, who belongs to a branch of her family that was ruined by the bankruptcies of 158*. Martona is madly in love with a good-looking silk weaver named Julien; your cousin must give the Perugian poison as a sleeping aid that we need to reduce the abbess’s vigilance, and it will kill her in six months.”

Count Buondelmonte had occasion to visit the court, and Grand Duke Ferdinand congratulated him on the exemplary tranquillity that reigned in the Abbey of Saint Reparata. The count went there to observe the fruits of his labors. One can imagine his astonishment when the abbess told him all about the double assassination, the end of which she had witnessed. The count quickly concluded that the abbess was entirely incapable of shedding any light on the cause of the double crime. “There is no one here intelligent enough to clarify what happened,” he said to himself, “except Félize, whose reasoning made such an impression and caused me such embarrassment on my first visit. But she is so preoccupied with the injustices of society and of the families toward nuns that she may not be willing to talk.”

The arrival at the convent of the grand duke’s envoy had thrown Félize into a state of wild joy. At last, she would see again that singular man, the sole cause of all the strange events of the last six months! But elsewhere in the convent, the arrival of the count had thrown Céliane and her friend young Fabienne into a state of profound terror.

“We’ll be lost because of your scruples,” Céliane said to Fabienne. “The abbess is too weak not to have talked. And now our lives are in the count’s hands. We have two choices: we can flee, but with whom could we live? Our brothers’ avarice will supply all the motivation they need to reject us for the suspicion of crime that hangs over us, and refuse us bread. In the old days, when Tuscany was only a province of Spain, unfortunate persecuted Tuscans could find refuge in France. But this grand duke cardinal is trying to shake off the yoke of Spain. There is no refuge possible for us, and there, my poor friend, is where your childish scruples have landed us. So we are even more obligated now to commit the crime, because Martona and the abbess are the only witnesses of what happened that night. Rodelinde’s aunt will say nothing; she won’t want to compromise the reputation of the convent so dear to her. Martona, once she has given the so-called sleeping aid to the abbess, will be sure to say nothing when we tell her it was really poison. And after all, she’s a good sort, madly in love with her Julien.”

It would take too long to give a full account of the intelligent conversation that Félice had with the count. She was always mindful of the error she had made in giving in so easily on the matter of the two additional maids. The result had been that the count was absent from the convent for six months. Félice promised herself that she would not slip into an error like that again. The count had requested, in the most gracious manner possible, a conversation with her in the visiting room. The invitation had Félice beside herself. It was only by making an effort to remember her feminine dignity that she was able to put the conversation off till the following day. But upon arriving in the visiting room, where the count sat by himself, even though separated by a grill with huge, thick bars, Félice felt a timidity come over her

that she had never before known. Her surprise was extreme, and now she deeply regretted the idea that just the day before had seemed so easy and pleasant to her. We mean that avowal of her passion for the count that she had made to the abbess, so that it would be passed on to the count. Back then, she was far from loving him in the way she did now. The idea of laying siege to the heart of this grave commissioner who had been given to the convent by the prince had seemed pleasurable to her. Now, her feelings were entirely different: making him like her was essential to her happiness; if she did not succeed, she would be miserable, and what would a grave, serious man like him make of the strange disclosure made by the abbess? He would almost certainly find it indecent, and this idea was torture to Félize. But talking was necessary. The count was there, serious, seated before her and complimenting her on her intelligence. Had the abbess already spoken to him? The young nun's whole attention was focused on that one great question. Fortunately for her, she thought she could see what was in fact the truth: that the abbess, still terrified by the sight of those two corpses that appeared on the fatal night, had forgotten the trivial detail of the mad love a young nun had conceived.

The count, for his part, could easily see the extreme anxiety this beautiful person was suffering, and he was not sure what had caused it. "Could she be guilty?" he asked himself. The idea troubled him—him, the rational one. The suspicion led him to pay the most extreme and serious attention to the young nun's responses. This was an honor that had not been accorded to any woman of his acquaintance for a long time. He admired the way Félize handled herself. She found a way to make each of her responses flattering to the count with regard to everything he said about the fight that had taken place near the convent's gate; but she always resisted saying anything conclusive. After

an hour and a half of conversation during which the count was never bored for a moment, he took his leave of the young nun, entreating her to grant him a second meeting in a few days. The request poured a celestial happiness into the heart of Félice.

The count departed the Abbey of Saint Reparata in a pensive mood.

“My duty without a doubt,” he said to himself, “is to give the prince a report on all the strange things I have just heard. The whole state has been preoccupied with the strange deaths of these two poor young men, so brilliant and so rich. On the other hand, considering the terrible bishop that the prince-cardinal has just named, to say anything of what has happened would result in introducing all the fury of the Spanish Inquisition into this unfortunate convent. That terrible bishop would put not one but five or six of these young women to death; and who would be guilty of their deaths if not I, whose sin in remaining silent, on the other hand, would be only a slight abuse of the confidence placed in me? If the prince finds out what has happened and reproaches me, I shall say to him, ‘Your terrible bishop frightens me.’”

The count dared not avow to himself fully all the motives he had for remaining silent. He was not sure that Félice was innocent, and his whole being was seized by horror at the very idea of putting the life of such a young girl in peril, one who had been so cruelly treated by her family and by society.

“She would have been the ornament of Florence,” he said to himself, “if someone had married her.”

The count had been invited to a magnificent hunting party in the Maremma near Siena, half of which belonged to him, along with the greatest lords of the court and the richest merchants of Florence. He

made his excuses to them, the hunt took place without him, and Fé-
lize was startled to hear, the very day after their conversation, the hoof-
beats of the count's horses in the outer courtyard of the convent. The
grand duke's envoy, in resolving not to tell the prince about what had
happened, had also felt that he now had the obligation to watch over
the future tranquillity of the convent. Now, in order to do this, the
first thing he had to do was to find out what part the two nuns whose
lovers had perished had had in their deaths. After a very long con-
versation with the abbess, the count called eight or ten nuns, among
whom were Céliane and Fabienne. He found to his great astonish-
ment that, just as the abbess had told him, eight of them were com-
pletely ignorant of what had happened on the fatal night. The count's
only direct interrogations were of Céliane and Fabienne; they denied
everything, Céliane with the firmness of a soul superior to even the
greatest misfortunes, and the young Fabienne like a young girl in de-
spair who was being barbarously forced to recall the source of all her
misery. She was horribly haggard and seemed to be suffering from
some malady of the chest; she could not be consoled for the death of
the young Lorenzo B***.

"I am the one who killed him," she would say to Céliane during
the long talks between the two of them; "I should have been able to
manage better the self-love of Don César, his predecessor, when I
broke it off with him."

When she came into the visiting room this time, Félice understood
that the abbess had been weak enough to tell the grand duke's envoy
about the love she felt for him; the behavior of the wise Buondelmonte
had completely changed. At first, this was a matter of great embar-
rassment for Félice, and she reddened at it. Without exactly realizing
this, she was charming during the long conversation she had with the

count, but she admitted to nothing. The abbess understood nothing of what she had seen, or rather, to all appearances, what she had failed to see. Céliane and Fabienne admitted nothing. The count was perplexed.

“If I question the *caméristes nobles* and the domestics, it will be the same as giving the bishop entrée to the affair. They will speak to their confessors, and the Inquisition will be visited upon the convent.”

Greatly troubled, the count returned every day to Saint Reparata. He took it upon himself to question all the nuns, then all the *caméristes nobles*, and then all the servants. He discovered the truth about an infanticide that had taken place three years before, which he had been informed about by the officer of the ecclesiastical court, presided over by the bishop. But, to his astonishment, he saw that the story of the two young men who entered the abbey gardens and died there was known only by the abbess, Céliane, Fabienne, and Félice and her friend, Rodelinde. The aunt of the latter was so good at dissimulation that she escaped suspicion altogether. The terror inspired by the new bishop, Monsignor ***, was so great that, with the exception of the abbess and Félice, the depositions of all the other nuns, who were clearly colluding, were always couched in exactly the same terms. The count ended every session at the convent with a long conversation with Félice, which was pure happiness for her, but in order to make these conversations last longer, she took great care to explain to the count only a little each day of what she knew about the deaths of the two young cavaliers. But when it came to personal topics, she was, on the contrary, a model of frankness. She had had three lovers; she told the count, who had by now practically become her friend, the whole story of her love life. The perfect frankness of this young girl,

so beautiful and so intelligent, so captivated the count that he could only respond to that frankness with a candor of his own.

"I do not think I could repay your stories," he said to Félize, "with anything of my own as interesting. I do not know if I would dare tell you about all the persons of your sex that I have met who have always inspired in me more contempt for their characters than admiration for their beauty."

The count's frequent visits kept Céliane troubled. Fabienne, more and more absorbed in her grief, had ceased to voice her repugnance to the counsels of her friend. When her turn to guard the convent door came, she opened it up, looked away, and Julien, the young silk worker and boyfriend of Martona, the confidante of the abbess, could slip inside. Eight whole days passed before Fabienne again had her turn as portress and could let him out again. It seems that it was during this long stay that Martona gave the sleeping aid to the abbess, who wanted her confidante by her side day and night; Martona had been touched by the complaints of Julien, who was bored to death, all alone and locked up in her room.

Julie, a young and very devout nun, was passing through the large dormitory one evening when she heard the sound of talking coming from Martona's room. She crept up close, not making a sound, put her eye to the keyhole, and saw a handsome young man sitting at the table eating and laughing with Martona. Julie rapped on the door a few times, then thought how Martona might well open the door and then close it behind her with the young man within, and then go on to denounce her, Julie, to the abbess, as she knew that Martona spent most of her life with the abbess; Julie was suddenly seized with an extreme distress. In her imagination, she could see herself being pursued

down the deserted and dark corridor, for it was not yet time to light the lamps, by Martona, who was much stronger than she was. Highly disturbed, Julie took flight, but she heard Martona open her door, and, thinking she had been recognized, Julie went to tell everything to the abbess, who, horribly scandalized, rushed to Martona's room only to find no Julien, who had fled out into the garden. But that same night, the abbess having decided it would be prudent, even for Martona's reputation, to have her spend the night in the abbess's room, and having announced that the following morning she would go herself, accompanied by Father ***, the convent's confessor, and put locks on the door of Martona's room, where wicked rumor had claimed a young man had been hidden, Martona, irritated and busy at the moment preparing the hot chocolate that constituted dinner for the abbess, mixed into it a huge quantity of the so-called sleeping aid.

The next morning the abbess Virgilia found herself in a highly unusual state of nervous irritation and, upon looking in the mirror, she saw a figure so changed that she thought she was about to die. The first effect of the Perugian poison is to render those who have swallowed it almost mad. Virgilia remembered that one of the privileges granted to the abbess of the noble Convent of Saint Reparata was to be assisted in her last moments by the bishop; she wrote to that prelate, who soon arrived at the convent. She told him not only about her malady but also the story of the two corpses. The bishop scolded her severely for not having told him about an incident so singular and so criminal. The abbess replied that the envoy of the grand duke, Count Buondelmonte, had strongly advised her to avoid scandal.

"And just how did this layman have the audacity to call scandal what is the strict accomplishment of your duties?"

When she saw the bishop arrive at the convent, Céliane said to Fabienne:

“We are lost. This fanatical prelate wants to introduce the reforms of the Council of Trent at all costs in the convents of his diocese—he will be a very different man for us from the Count Buondelmonte.”

Fabienne threw herself, weeping, into Céliane’s arms.

“Death is nothing to me, but I’ll die in doubled despair at having caused your fall, and without even saving the life of that miserable abbess.”

Fabienne went to the cell of the woman who, that evening, would be the portress. Without giving her any more detail, she said that they had to save the life and the honor of Martona, who had had the imprudence to receive a man in her cell. After a great many difficulties, the nun consented to leave the door open and abandon it for a moment, a little after eleven o’clock in the evening.

During this time, Céliane had sent a message to Martona to meet her in the choir. This was an immense space, like a second church, separated by a grill from the public, the vault of which stood more than forty feet in height. Martona was kneeling in the middle of the choir so that if she spoke quietly, she could not be overheard. Céliane came up next to her.

“Here,” she said to her, “is a purse with all the money Fabienne and I could get together. Tonight or tomorrow night, I will arrange for the convent door to be open for a moment. Have Julien escape, and yourself, too, and get away as soon as you can. I can assure you that the abbess Virgilia has told everything to the terrible bishop, and his tribunal will undoubtedly condemn you to fifteen years in prison or even death.”

Martona made a movement as if to throw herself at Céliane's knees.

"What are you doing, you fool?" cried Céliane, and she had the time to correct her movement. "Remember that you and Julien could be arrested at any moment. From now until your flight, hide yourself as best as you can, and above all pay attention to the people who go into the visiting room of the abbess."

The next morning, on arriving at the convent, the count found many changes. Martona, the confidante of the abbess, had disappeared during the night; the abbess herself was so weakened that in order to receive the envoy of the grand duke, she had to be carried in on a chair. She admitted to the count that she had told the bishop everything.

"In that case, we are going to have a great deal of blood or of poison," he cried. . . .²

SUORA SCOLASTICA

A STORY THAT SHOCKED

ALL NAPLES IN 1740

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As you may know, one day toward the beginning of the eighteenth century, that century which was going to end so very badly for his dynasty, the insane pride of Louis XIV led him to send a child to occupy the throne of Spain, the Duke d'Anjou, intensely pious and half-mad himself.¹ That pride of Louis's would have been better served if he had attempted to reunite France with Belgium and Milan, as foreigners suggested to him. In 1740, Don Carlos reigned in Naples.² He was the son of a Farnese princess of Parma who wanted him to wear a crown even though he was a younger son; to that end, she sent him into Italy with an army. He won the battle of Velletri, after having been surprised that very morning by a company of Austrians in his bedchamber. The Duke Vargas del Pardo, one of the Spanish noblemen whom the Farnese queen had attached to Don Carlos, saved his life, or at least his liberty, by giving him a boost up so he could escape out his bedroom window.

Don Carlos had an immense nose and no small intelligence as well; after he had been installed in Naples under the name Charles III, he gathered around him a brilliant court. He attempted to bind his new subjects to him through pleasures while at the same time imposing a strict severity throughout the different levels of the administration. Gone were the Spanish viceroys whose prudence was celebrated by the Masaniello revolt;³ and gone were the harsh, eager Austrian generals. In the wake of all the changes and confiscations carried out by the new king, he found himself more or less absolute master of all. Most of the great nobles either had seen some of their lands confiscated or had been given a gift of lands confiscated from the unlucky ones, who were now termed traitors. This state of things, together with the necessity of spending a great deal in order to please the new king, had the effect of making most of the higher nobility pay close attention to their own affairs.

And while the nobility was busy trying to get ahead at court, the merchants were delighted to find they were no longer subject to the incredible high-handedness of the Spanish viceroys and the severities of the Austrian generals; at the same time, the people were stunned to see that the government was not always doing the wrong thing, and as a result they got used to paying taxes, which were passed on, in part, to the nobility and the clergy.

Don Carlos reigned thus for five years, in an atmosphere of tranquillity and ease.

With many favorable circumstances coming together, the winter of 1740–1741 was remarkable for the number of charming parties given. Eight or ten women of rare beauty shared among themselves a great deal of praise, but the young king, a connoisseur of such things, declared that the most beautiful woman at his court was the young

Rosalinde, daughter of Prince d'Atella. This prince, a former Austrian general, a very somber, very prudent man, had ceded despite his better judgment to his wife's insistence—his second wife, Dona Ferdinanda—and permitted her to bring along her daughter, this same beautiful Rosalinde, whom the king considered the most beautiful creature in his kingdom and who had just turned seventeen. Prince d'Atella had three sons by his first marriage, and getting them established in society was a great worry to him. The titles these sons bore, all dukes or princes, seemed too imposing for the mediocre fortune he would be able to leave them.

Prince d'Atella was very much in love with his wife, a gay, imprudent woman thirty years his junior—which did not, unfortunately, preclude her from now being what is called of a certain age. During the great parties of the winter of 1740, it was to her daughter Rosalinde that she owed the gratifying pleasure of being always surrounded at court by all the most brilliant young people of Naples. She especially took note of Genarino, the Marquis of Las Flores. This young man combined the most noble, even somewhat haughty style of Spanish manners with the most gracious, most cheerful countenance; his hair and his mustaches were of a fine blond, he had blue eyes, a rarity in a Gothic family, and, what made him even more striking in the eyes of the ladies of the court, he had already been wounded twice by spouses or brothers in families into which he had brought some disorder.

The young man was adroit enough to convince Princess d'Atella that it was she to whom he wanted to pay homage, when in fact he was in love with the young Rosalinde—and moreover, he was jealous. That same Duke Vargas del Pardo who had been so useful to Don Carlos in the early morning before the battle of Velletri and who

now enjoyed the highest degree of favor from the young king had been so struck by the naive graces and the simple air of good faith that shone from the young Rosalinde that he began to court her in the most majestic of manners, suitable to a man who was a triple grandee of Spain. But he took snuff and he wore a periwig; and these two are precisely the things most horrifying to young ladies of Naples, and even though Rosalinde had a dowry of perhaps 20,000 francs and had no better prospects in life than to enter the Convent of San Petito, situated in the highest part of the Via Toledo,⁴ which then served as the most fashionable tomb for girls of the highest rank—despite all this, she could never bring herself to contemplate the passionate gaze of the Duke del Pardo. On the contrary, however, she very much liked the eyes that Don Genarino made at her in those moments when he was not being observed by Princess d'Atella; indeed, it is not altogether impossible that the young Rosalinde might have returned the glances of Genarino from time to time. In fact, this love was not a very sensible one; in fact, the house of Las Flores was among the noblest, but the old duke of that name, father of Don Genarino, had three sons, and, according to the custom of the country, he had arranged things so that the eldest would have 15,000 ducats of annual income (around 50,000 francs), whereas the two younger ones would have to content themselves with pensions of 20 ducats a month, along with lodging in the palazzos in town and in the country. Without exactly having come to an agreement on the matter, Don Genarino and young Rosalinde took the greatest of care in concealing their feelings from Princess d'Atella. Her coquetry always maintained for her the false ideas she had formed about the young marquis. Her husband, the old general, was more clear-sighted: at the previous party given

that winter by the king, Don Carlos, he understood perfectly well that Don Genarino, already famous for more than one amorous adventure, had set a goal of pleasing either his wife or his daughter, either possibility being equally unpleasant for him. The next day after breakfast, he ordered his daughter Rosalinde to get up into the carriage with him, and without speaking a single word, he took her directly to the Convent of San Petito; this is the convent, then so fashionable, with the magnificent facade that one can see on the left at the highest point of the Via Toledo, near the magnificent Palazzo degli Studi. Those great extended walls that one adheres to for so long when walking through the Vomero area, above the Arenella Quarter, seem designed to keep profane eyes from looking into the gardens of San Petito. The prince spoke only to introduce his daughter to his sister, the severe Donna *****. He said to Rosalinde, with the air of giving her some information that she should be grateful to hear, that she would leave the Convent of San Petito only one more time in her life, and that would be on the eve of her taking her final vows.

Rosalinde was not at all surprised by what was happening to her; she knew that her getting married would take nothing less than a miracle, and she had a horror of marrying Duke Vargas del Pardo; moreover, she had spent several years as a pensioner at this Convent of San Petito, where they took her now, and her memories of the place were happy and amusing ones. The first day, she was not too disturbed by her situation, but by the second, she began to think she would never again see the young Don Genarino, and, despite her youth, this idea began to afflict her greatly. Cheerful and giddy as she was, within two weeks she was among the least resigned and most sorrowful girls in the convent. Twenty times a day, perhaps, she thought of that young

Don Genarino, whereas when she had been at her father's home, the idea of the amiable young man crossed her mind only once or twice a day.

Three weeks after her arrival at the convent, it so happened that she was able to recite flawlessly the litanies of the Virgin at evening prayers, and the mistress of the novices gave her permission the next day to go up to the belvedere—which is what they call that spacious gallery that the nuns decorate with gilt and paintings and which occupies the upper part on the side of the Convent of San Petito that borders on the Via Toledo. Rosalinde was enchanted at looking down and seeing the double line of fine carriages that at that hour occupied this higher section of the Via Toledo, and she recognized most of the coaches and the women inside them. The sight amused and afflicted her at the same time; but how to describe the trouble that arose in her soul at the sight of a young man standing under a porte cochere holding out a magnificent bouquet of flowers? It was Don Genarino, who, ever since Rosalinde had been stolen out of society, came every day to this same spot in the hope that she would appear at the belvedere of the noble sisters; and knowing that she loved beautiful flowers, and in order to make himself more visible to her, he took care to equip himself every time with a bouquet of the rarest flowers. Don Genarino's heart leaped with joy when he saw that she had recognized him; he began to make signs to her, to which Rosalinde was careful about responding, reflecting that according to the rule of Saint Benedict, it could well be several weeks before she was permitted to come up to the belvedere again. She saw around her a crowd of nuns chattering and making signals to their friends, and these women seemed embarrassed around this young girl in her white veil, who might very well be surprised at their not very religious behavior and

might in fact report them. The reader must be told that in Naples, from their very early years, girls are accustomed to communicating with their fingers, the different positions of the fingers forming different letters; one can observe them even in the salons discoursing silently with a young man seated twenty paces away, while their parents are conversing out loud.

Genarino trembled at the thought that Rosalinde's vocation might be a sincere one. He stepped back a bit under the porte cochere, and from there he signaled to her using childish language:

"Ever since I haven't been seeing you, I have been unhappy. Are you happy in the convent? Are you free to come up to the belvedere often? Do you still like flowers?"

Rosalinde stared at him fixedly but did not respond. Suddenly, she disappeared, whether because she had been called away by the novice mistress or because the few words Genarino had addressed to her had somehow offended her. He was greatly distressed.

He went into the pretty wooded area that overlooks Naples, called Arenella, where the long wall stretches out, girdling the Convent of San Petito. Continuing his melancholy walk, he came to the plain of Vomero with its view over the city all the way to the sea; he went on about one league from there and came to the magnificent castle of Duke Vargas del Pardo. This crenellated, black-walled castle was a medieval fortress, famous in Naples both for its somber look and for the duke's mania for hiring only Spaniards as domestics, all of them as old as he was: he liked to say that when he was here, he could feel that he was in Spain, and in order to maintain the illusion, he had all the trees in the neighborhood cut down. Whenever his service to the king permitted it, the duke came to enjoy the air at his castle of San Nicola. The somber edifice only heightened Don Genarino's

melancholy. As he passed by, following the wall that girdled the garden of San Petito, an idea came to him: "Surely she still loves flowers," he thought to himself, "and the nuns must cultivate many in that immense garden, and therefore there must be gardeners—and therefore I must find a way to meet them." In this sparsely populated area, there was a little *osteria* (café); he went in, but, being preoccupied with his ideas, he did not consider that his clothes were far too rich for such a place, and now he saw that his presence was arousing surprise and even considerable suspicion; he proceeded to feign great fatigue, and he acted very friendly to the owners of the place as well as to the ordinary people who had come there to drink a few glasses of wine. His open manner soon atoned for his clothes, which were too showy for the circumstances. Genarino did not disdain joining the host and the host's friends in drinking some wine that was claimed to be finer than it really was. Finally, after an hour's efforts, he saw that his presence no longer bothered anyone. He began jesting about the aristocratic nuns of San Petito and about the visitors that some of them received over the garden walls. Genarino assured himself that this kind of thing, so often spoken about in Naples, in fact did go on. The good peasants of Vomero jested, too, but they did not seem particularly scandalized by it.

"These poor girls enter the convent only out of a sense of vocation, or so our curé says, but it's more likely because they've been thrown out by their fathers, who want the elder brother to inherit everything, and so it's perfectly natural that they should amuse themselves. But this has become a little more difficult with the new mother superior, Madame Angela Maria, daughter of the Marquis of Castropignano, who has taken it into her head to try to impress the king and to get a ducal crown placed on her nephew's head by tormenting these poor

young girls, who never once gave a single thought to making vows to God and the Madonna. It's a pleasure to see their gaiety as they play in the garden; these are pensioners, not nuns, who are being forced into serious vows and who will be damned if they do not concentrate on fulfilling them. Recently, in honor of their great nobility, the cardinal archbishop of Naples went to Rome to get the privilege of letting them take their vows at sixteen instead of seventeen, and there were great celebrations in the convent over this great honor being done to the poor girls."

"But you were speaking of the garden," said Genarino; "it seems small to me."

"Small?" said everyone at once. "Obviously you haven't looked at it very carefully; it covers more than thirty acres, and Master Beppo, the head gardener, sometimes employs more than twelve workers."

"Well, this head gardener must be a good-looking young man," said Genarino with a laugh.

Everyone laughed and exclaimed, "You don't know the abbess of Castropignano; she's exactly the kind of woman to put up with that kind of thing! Signor Beppo had to prove that he was over seventy; he used to work for the Marquis of Las Flores, who has that fine garden at Ceri."

Genarino gave a little leap of joy.

"What's the matter with you?" asked his new friends.

"Oh, nothing; I'm just tired."

He had realized that Signor Beppo had in fact been his father's gardener. In the course of the conversation, he smoothly inquired as to where this Signor Beppo, head gardener, lived and how one could encounter him. And in fact he saw him the very next day. The old gardener shed tears of joy when he recognized the younger son of his

old master the Marquis de Las Flores; he had often held the child in his arms, and there was nothing he could refuse him. Genarino complained about his father's avarice and implied that a hundred ducats would be all he needed to extricate himself from a serious problem.

Two days later, the novice Rosalinde—who now was called Sister Scolastica—was walking by herself alongside a lovely flowerbed situated on the right side of the garden, when the old man Beppo approached her:

"I have been very familiar with the noble family of the d'Atella princes," he said to her. "In my youth, I was employed in their garden, and if mademoiselle will permit me, I will give her a beautiful rose I have wrapped in vine leaves, but only on condition that mademoiselle will not unwrap it until she is in her room and alone."

Rosalinde took the rose, barely saying thank you, put it in her bosom, and strode off pensively to her cell. Because she was the daughter of a prince and destined to become a nun of the first class, this cell was composed of three rooms. As soon as she entered, Rosalinde lit her lamp; she began to take the rose out of her bosom, but in doing so the calyx detached from the stem, and under the surrounding leaves she found the following letter; her heart beating powerfully, she did not scruple to read it immediately:

I do not have much in the way of riches, just like you, beautiful Rosalinde, because just as you have been sacrificed to the advancement of your brothers, so I can never forget that I am the third son of the Marquis de Las Flores. Since I lost you, the king has made me a standard-bearer in his guard, and on that occasion my father informed me that I, my people, and my horses may all be lodged and fed at the family palazzo but that beyond that I must plan to live on

an income of 10 ducats per month, a sum that in our family has always been given the younger brothers; therefore, my dear Rosalinde, we are both of us poor, both of us equally disinherited; but consider whether this means we must remain unhappy for the rest of our lives. The desperate situation in which you and I are placed is what gives me the boldness to say openly to you that we love each other and that we should not let ourselves become accomplices in the cruel avarice of our parents. I will eventually marry you; a man of my birth will always find some means of supporting himself. I will pay my court [illegible words] without forgetting one or two friends of the family. The only thing I fear is your own extreme piety: as we begin a correspondence together, do not see yourself as a nun being unfaithful to her vows—far from it: you are a young woman whom they're trying to separate from the man her heart has chosen. Be brave, and do not be irritated with me; I don't want to shock you with my boldness, but my heart is desolate when I think of going two weeks without seeing you, and I am so much in love. At those balls and events where we met, in those bygone days, the happiest days of my life, my respect for you kept me from speaking in so frank a manner, but who knows if I will have the chance of writing you a second letter? My cousin, Sister *****, whom I'm going to see as often as I can, told me that it might be another two weeks before you have permission to come up onto the belvedere again. I will be at the same place on the Via Toledo every day, perhaps wearing some disguise so I am not recognized and so the guards of the regiment do not start making jests about me. If you only knew how different and how unpleasant my life has become since I lost you! I have danced only once, and that was because Princess d'Atella came to where I was sitting and sought me out. Our poverty makes us dependent upon everyone, so be very polite and

even friendly with the domestics; the old gardener Beppo has been useful to me solely because he was in my father's employ for twenty years in our gardens at Ceri. Will you be horrified at what I am about to say? By the seaside, in Calabria, eighty leagues from Naples, my mother owns an estate with a farm that costs 600 ducats to run. My mother has a tenderness for me, and if I asked her very seriously, she would arrange it so that the steward there would farm it for me for that same figure of 600 a year. Now, since they have told me I will have a pension of 120, I would have to pay only 480, and we would have all the benefits of the farm. It is true, though, that since this proposition is somewhat dishonorable, I would have to adopt the name of that farm, which is called *****. But I dare not go on: the idea I am leaving you with may be shocking to you; what, give up life in the noble city of Naples forever? I am being foolhardy even to think of it. Consider also that I may expect the death of my elder brothers at some point. Farewell, dear Rosalinde; you must find me awfully serious, but you have no idea of the kind of things that have been running through my head during these weeks that I have been so far away from you; I feel like I haven't really been alive. In any case, pardon these follies of mine.

Rosalinde did not reply to this first letter, and it was soon followed by many others. The greatest favor she accorded to Genarino during this period was to send him a flower via the old gardener Beppo, who had become a friend to Sister Scolastica, perhaps because he always had some little anecdote about Genarino as a child. The latter spent his days prowling around outside the convent walls; he never went out into society, and he was never seen at court except when his military duty required it; his life had become quite sad, and he did not

have to exaggerate much to convince Sister Scolastica that he wished for an early death. This strange love that had taken over his heart had left him so miserable that he dared to write to his beloved to say that this cold correspondence no longer afforded him any pleasure and that he needed to speak out loud with her, and right away, for he had a thousand things to tell her. He suggested that she allow him to come in and stand in the garden beneath her window, accompanied by Beppo. After much persuading, Rosalinde softened, and he was admitted into the garden. These interviews had so much charm for both parties that they were repeated much more often than prudence would dictate; soon, the presence of Beppo was considered no longer useful; sharing in the natural laziness of all Neapolitans, he left the little service gate to the garden open, and Genarino would close the gate when he left, in keeping with the custom established by Saint Benedict himself in a troubled century when everyone had to be careful. At three o'clock in the morning, the hour when nuns betake themselves to the chapel to sing their matins, they need to pass through the convent's courtyards and the garden; and here is how that custom played out in the Convent of San Petito: the aristocratic nuns by no means arose at three in the morning, instead paying poor girls to take their places and sing the matins for them, and at this time the door to a little building in the garden was opened; this building housed three old soldiers, all over seventy. These well-armed soldiers were supposed to go through the garden and rouse up several big dogs that stayed chained up all day long. Ordinarily, these visits went off quite calmly, but one fine night, the dogs made such a racket that the whole convent was awakened. The soldiers, who had gone back to bed after having left the dogs, ran in quickly to prove that they were present, and they let off a number of gunshots. The abbess was afraid for her

family's ducal prospects. It was all because of Genarino, who had lost track of the time in conversing outside Rosalinde's window and now just barely had time to make his escape, followed so closely by the furious dogs that he was unable to get the gate closed, and the next day, the abbess Angela Custode⁵ was deeply scandalized to learn that the convent dogs had traversed the whole forest of Arenella and half the plain of Vomero. It was clear to her that the garden gate had been found open at the very moment that the dogs started their racket. Ever concerned for the honor of the convent, the abbess declared that thieves had got into the garden because of the old gardeners' negligence, and she fired the latter, replacing them with others, a measure that caused a kind of revolt within the convent, because several of the nuns found this tyrannical. This garden was by no means unpopular during the night, but most people were content simply to pass through, not to stay there. It was only Don Genarino, too much the honorable lover to ask his mistress to let him into her room, who was on the point of compromising all the convent's love affairs. The very next day, he succeeded in getting a letter to her begging her permission to let him climb up into her room, but Rosalinde would not agree until she was able to find a way to quiet the voice of her conscience; as we have explained, her cell, like all the cells of all the princesses destined to become nuns of the first class, was composed of three rooms. The last of these three rooms, into which no one ever went, was separated from a laundry storeroom by a simple wooden partition. Genarino succeeded in replacing one of the panels of this partition with one of a similar size; almost every night after getting into the convent via the garden, he entered headfirst through this species of window and had long meetings with his beloved; this happy state went on for a long time, and Genarino was already be-

ginning to solicit further favors when two nuns, who were already of a certain age and who also received their lovers via the garden, were struck by the young marquis's handsome face and resolved to steal him away from this insignificant novice. These ladies spoke to Genarino, and, in order to give a higher tone to their conversation, they reproached him for his habit of getting himself inside a sacred convent of young women through its garden. Genarino had just realized what their intentions were when he declared that he was making love not as a penance but for his own amusement, and he begged them to mind their own business. This unpleasant response, one given in a place where no one would dare to do such a thing today, ignited such a blind rage in the two aging nuns that, despite the unheard-of hour—it was two o'clock in the morning—they went straight off to awaken the abbess. Luckily for the young marquis, the two denouncing nuns had not recognized him; the abbess was his great-aunt, younger sister of his grandfather, passionately devoted to the glory and advancement of her family, and knowing that Charles III, the young king, was a courageous and severe devotee of the "rule,"⁶ she would have denounced the dangerous follies of Genarino to the prince, her nephew, and he would probably have been sent off to serve in Spain or at least in Sicily. The two nuns had a lot of trouble getting to the abbess and awakening her, but the minute the pious and zealous abbess understood what horrible crime was afoot, she ran off to Sister Scolastica's cell. Genarino, meanwhile, had not said anything to his beloved about his encounter with the two aging nuns, and he was conversing tranquilly with her in the room adjoining the storeroom when they heard the bedroom door of her little apartment being noisily opened; the only light in the room where the two lovers were together was the flickering light of the stars, and so their eyes were blinded when

suddenly confronted by the eight or ten illuminated lamps that accompanied the abbess. Genarino knew, like everyone in Naples, the extreme perils to which a nun or a simple novice would be exposed if she were convicted of having received a man into the little apartment they called a cell. He did not hesitate to leap out into the garden through the laundry-room window.

Abbess Angela Custode interrogated her on the spot. The crime was obvious; Scolastica could say nothing to justify herself. The abbess, a tall woman, pale, forty years of age and belonging to the highest level of aristocracy in the kingdom, had exactly the kind of moral qualities that those characteristics might suggest. She had all the courage necessary to have all the severity of the rule imposed everywhere, now that the young king, who had understood his vocation to be that of absolute monarch, had declared proudly that “he wanted the rule followed in all things,” the rule in all its exactitude; moreover, the abbess Angela Custode belonged to the family of Castropignano, enemies to the family of Prince d’Atella.

Poor Scolastica, discovered in the middle of the night in her room with a young man by such a crowd of people, and with all those lights, hid her face behind her hands and was so overwhelmed by shame that she failed to observe, at this first moment, which would be so decisive for her, the things that might turn out to be of great importance. The few things she was able to say were not favorable to her cause; she repeated twice:

“But that young man is my spouse.”

This phrase, giving rise to thoughts of things that were not true, gave a great deal of joy to the two denouncing sisters, and it was the abbess who, out of a spirit of justice, declared that, given the layout of the rooms, it was clear that the wicked libertine who had dared to

violate the convent's cloister was at least not found *in the same room* with the foolish novice; he had only got into the laundry storeroom; having removed part of the wooden partition that separated that storeroom from the cell of the novice Scolastica, he had no doubt spoken with her, but he had clearly not yet got into her room by the time he had been surprised, for when they had all come into the second room of Scolastica's cell, they could see the libertine in the storeroom, and it was from that room that he fled.

Poor Scolastica was so forlorn that she let herself be led down into a subterranean prison cell connected to the *in pace*⁷ of this noble convent, hewn out of the great soft rock on which today we see the magnificent Palazzo degli Studi. The only people imprisoned in this cell were nuns or novices who were condemned or who had been found in flagrante. That condition was engraved above the doorway, but that condition did not apply to the novice Scolastica. The abbess was aware of the abuse she was committing, but it was believed that the king wanted severity, and the abbess, always having her family's dukedom in mind, thought that she had already done enough for the young woman by declaring that the hideous libertine who had so wanted to dishonor this noble convent had not been admitted directly into her room.

Scolastica, left alone in a little cell dug out of the rock just five or six feet below a neighboring one that had been created by hollowing out the soft rock face, found herself somewhat comforted by the fact that she was now alone and not facing all those bright lamps that had blinded her and plunged her into shame. "And in fact," she said to herself, "which of these so-holy sisters can really feel so superior to me? I received into my room, but not into my bedroom, the young man I love and hope to marry. Everyone has heard the gossip that

many of these women who seem so strongly linked to heaven itself by their vows have night visitors, and since I've been in the convent, I've seen many things that make me believe the gossip is correct. These women say publicly that San Petito is not a convent like the kind the holy Council of Trent intended but simply a decent place of retreat where impoverished daughters of high birth, if they are unlucky enough to have brothers, can live economically. No one asks of them abstinence nor self-denial nor any inner miseries that would aggravate the bad luck of having no fortune to offer. As for me, the truth is that I came here with the intention of obeying my parents, but then Genarino came and told me he loved me, and I loved him, and even though we are both poor, we planned to marry and go live in the country on a little estate twenty leagues from Naples beside the sea beyond Salerno; his mother told him that she would give him the little farm that costs the family only 500 ducats a year, and his allowance as a younger son is 40 ducats a month, and they could not possibly refuse me the money that my family pays to keep me here in order to get rid of me, and that's another 10 ducats per month.⁸ We have gone over our calculations twenty times, and with all the little sums of money we could come up with, we could live, though without servants in livery but with what is really necessary for physical survival. The real difficulty is the attitude of our parents, who should let us live like ordinary bourgeois. Genarino thinks that all he would need to do to smooth everything out would be to adopt a name other than that of the duke his father."

These thoughts and others like them came to the aid of poor Scolastica, but the nuns in the convent, numbering almost 150, thought of the drama that had played out the night before as having added to the convent's reputation. Everybody in Naples said that these women

received their lovers in the rooms at night: well, here we have a young girl of high birth who cannot defend herself and who can be punished with all the severity called for by the rule, so long as one condition was met—that she could have no communication with her family for the entire duration of the proceedings. When the judgment was final and declared, the family would be unable to do anything to halt the strict and severe punishment, which would reverberate throughout Naples, and the reputation of the noble convent, which had been a little besmirched, would be revived throughout the kingdom.

The abbess Angela Custode assembled a panel consisting of seven nuns elected by all the others who were over seventy years old. Sister Scolastica refused to respond to them, and she was put into a room whose only window looked out onto a very high wall. There, she was required to observe total silence and was watched over by two lay sisters.

The strange incident befalling the Convent of San Petito, where all the great families of Naples had relatives living, was soon public knowledge. The cardinal archbishop asked the abbess for a report, and she told him everything but in such a way as to avoid any stain on the reputation of the noble convent. Because the family of Prince d'Atella was connected to everything that mattered in the kingdom, the archbishop, who could transfer the trial to his arch episcopal court (the *Curia Arcivescovile*), thought he had better find out what the king's orders would be. This monarch, always a friend to order, became furious when he heard the archbishop's report, and people said afterward that the Duke Vargas del Pardo, who was present during this report, said he had heard talk of the behavior of a nun named Dona Scolastica and, though she was unknown to him, he counseled the young prince to employ the greatest severity.

"After all, Your Majesty must always remember that he who does not fear God does not fear his king."

Upon his return to his palace, the archbishop convoked his arch episcopal tribunal on this sad matter: a vicar general, two lawyers, and a secretary went to the Convent of San Petito to begin the interrogation and inquiry. These gentlemen were never able to get anything more out of Sister Scolastica than this:

"There is nothing wicked in my actions. They are innocent. I can say nothing more than that, and I will say nothing more than that."

Following the schedule prescribed by law, and even extended on account of the abbess, who toward the end of the trial wanted to avoid at any price any scandal attaching to her convent, the arch episcopal tribunal considered that there was no *corpus delicti*, that is, that, following the deposition of the abbess, the witnesses had not seen Sister Scolastica and the man "in the same room," and in fact they had seen only a man fleeing from a neighboring, separate room, and so they ruled that this sister was condemned to remaining in the *in pace* until she agreed to provide the name of the man who was in the neighboring room and with whom she was conversing.

The next day, when Scolastica appeared to hear her sentence pronounced in front of the "elders," presided over by the abbess, the latter seemed to have a new way of thinking about the affair. She thought that it would be dangerous for the convent to try to manage the perceptions of a shrewd public with regard to the convent's inner disorder. She told the elders that that public would say: "'You are punishing an inept intrigue, but we know that there are hundreds of others.' Because we are dealing with a young king who wants to be seen as having character and who wants to have his laws observed, something unheard of in this country, we can profit from this fleeting

moment; we can obtain something that will be far more useful to the convent than the solemn condemnation of ten poor nuns before the archbishop of Naples and all the canons he would have assembled to make up his presidial tribunal. I want to see us punish the man who dared to penetrate our convent, to have just one fine, handsome young man from the court be thrown into some fortress prison for several years; this will do more than the condemnation of a hundred nuns—and anyway, it would be true justice, because, after all, the offense was carried out by a male. Now, Scolastica did not receive him, strictly speaking, in her room, and may God grant that all the other nuns in the convent have at least that much prudence as well. She will tell us who this imprudent young man was, give us the name of the one I will hunt down at the court, and, since, after all, she is guilty of very little, we will condemn her to only a light punishment.”

The abbess had a great deal of difficulty in getting the “elders” to see it her way, but in the end her birth and, above all, her relations at court were so superior to theirs that they were obliged to give in, and the abbess thought that the judgment interview would take only a moment. But it turned out quite otherwise.

Scolastica, having recited her prayers on her knees before the tribunal, as was the custom, added only these few words:

“I do not consider myself in any way a nun; I have known a young man in the world outside, and though we are both poor, we have the intention of marrying.”

This open disrespect of the convent’s basic values was the gravest crime one could commit in the aristocratic Convent of San Petito.

“But the name, the name of the young man!” cried the abbess, impatiently interrupting what she assumed would be a lengthy discourse by Scolastica on the superiority of the married state.

Scolastica replied, "You will never have that name; I will never say something to injure the man who should be my spouse."

Though the abbess and the "elders" continued to try, the young novice would never give them the name of Genarino. The abbess went so far as to say:

"You will be entirely pardoned and I will send you immediately back to your own apartment if you simply tell us this one thing."

The young woman made the sign of the cross, bowed deeply, and signaled that she could say no more; she knew very well that Genarino was the nephew of this terrible abbess. "If I name him," she said to herself, "I will be pardoned and my offense forgotten, but he will undergo some awful punishment like being sent away to Sicily or even to Spain, and I will never see him again."

The abbess was so irritated with the invincible silence of the young Scolastica that she forgot all her plans of clemency and hastened to give a report to the cardinal archbishop of Naples on what had happened at the convent the earlier night. Always aiming to please the king, who desired strictness, the cardinal archbishop took the affair to heart, but, being unable to discover anything, even using the intervention of every curé in the capital and all the spies dependent on the archdiocese, the cardinal spoke to the king, who in turn hastened to bring in his minister of police, and the latter said to the king:

"It seems to me that Your Majesty, without having recourse to bloodshed, which will long be remembered, can scarcely make an example of this man who got into the storeroom of San Petito, unless he is found to belong to the court or to one of the first families of Naples."

The king, having seen the minister's point, presented him with a list of 247 persons, any one of whom could, without much improbability, be suspected of having penetrated the noble convent.

One week later, Genarino was arrested, following the simple observation that for the past six months, he had fallen into a thriftiness bordering on avarice, and that since the night in question, his behavior seemed to have changed markedly.

To determine the degree of confidence he could assume, the minister involved the abbess, who had Sister Scolastica taken up from the half-underground prison where she lived and brought to her parlor. She was exhorted to reply truthfully, and then the minister of police came into the parlor, telling the abbess in the presence of Scolastica that the young Genarino had just been killed by the guards he was fleeing. Scolastica fainted and fell on the floor.

"There is our proof," cried the minister triumphantly; "I've learned more with six words than Your Reverence would have learned with six months of effort."

But he was surprised by the extreme coldness with which the abbess received his exclamation. The minister, as was the custom at this court, was a bourgeois, and as a consequence of this, the abbess thought it right to use her haughtiest manner with him. Genarino was her nephew, and she feared that this imputation, which would be directly put before the king's eyes, would do harm to her noble family. The minister, knowing himself to be despised by the nobility and having no hopes except in the king, followed up on the information he had just obtained and, despite all the appeals made to the Prince [*missing words*]. The affair began to be talked about at court, and the minister, who would normally try to avoid scandal, in this case sought to ignite it.

It was a fine spectacle, one to which all the ladies of the court flocked, this formal confrontation of Genarino, standard-bearer of the guards, with the young Rosalinde d'Attella, now Sister Scolastica, novice at San Petito; the inner and outer areas of the convent

chapel were magnificently decorated for the occasion, and it was through the minister himself that invitations to the ladies were distributed, to attend the opening of the trial of Genarino de Las Flores, standard-bearer of the guards. The minister let it be known that the trial entailed capital punishment for the young Genarino and an eternal imprisonment in the *in pace* for Sister Scolastica. But everyone knew perfectly well that the king would not dare have someone executed for so minor an offense, especially a member of the illustrious house of Las Flores. To the great displeasure of the ladies, [*missing words*]

The interior of the San Petito church was ornamented and gilded with the greatest magnificence. Many of the noble nuns, if it had not been for their vows of poverty, would have inherited all their families' holdings. In such cases, the conscientious families would leave them a quarter or a sixth of the revenues that might have been due them, and this would be theirs for the rest of what was never a very long life.

All these sums were now employed for the decoration of the outer area of the church, which was open to the public, and for the inner area, where the nuns came to pray and carried out their offices. The inner church at San Petito, or the nuns' choir section, was separated from the rest by a gilded grill sixty feet high. For the ceremony of the confrontation, the immense door of this grill, which can be opened only in the presence of the archbishop of Naples, had been opened, and all the titled women had been admitted into the choir, whereas the outer church had been arranged with the throne of the archbishop in the forefront, then the ladies without titles, then the men; and finally, a chain had been extended across the width of the church, and behind that were crowded all the rest of the faithful.

The immense curtain of green silk that hung over the sixty-foot grill from on high had at its center a Madonna, framed with thick braid, and this curtain had been moved to the back of the choir area. There, after having been attached to the vaulted ceiling, it had been hung. The prie-dieu where Sister Scolastica knelt was placed a little behind the spot on the ceiling where the great curtain had been attached, and at the moment when her sentence was declared, the great veil descended, separating her entirely from the public and terminating the ceremony in the most imposing fashion, filling the heart of every spectator with fear and sadness. It was as if the poor girl had just been separated forever from the living.

To the great displeasure of the fine ladies from the court of Naples, the ceremony of confrontation itself lasted only a moment. Never had the young Rosalinde—to use the language of the ladies of the court—appeared better to her advantage than she did in her simple novice's habit; she was just as beautiful as she had been in other days, when she had accompanied her stepmother, Princess d'Atella, to court balls, though now her features were even more touching, for she had grown much thinner and paler. Her voice could scarcely be heard when, following a "Veni Creator," composed by Pergolese and sung by all the voices in the convent, Scolastica, half-mad with love and happiness upon seeing her beloved again after an absence of more than a year, said these words:

"I do not know this gentleman; I have never met him."

The minister of police reacted furiously upon hearing this and seeing the great curtain fall abruptly, which put a somewhat ridiculous end to the great spectacle he had hoped to present to the court. As he left the convent, he was heard to mutter dark threats. As he was being brought back to prison, Don Genarino was told everything the minister said. His friends had not deserted him; but it was not his love for

her that gave him such worth in their eyes, for if we believe in the passionate love that our friend has confided to us, we are jealous of him, and if we don't believe in it, we find him ludicrous. Don Genarino, in his despair, told his friends that he was now committed, in the way that circumstances sometimes require a man of honor to commit himself, to delivering Sister Scolastica from the dangers into which he had plunged her. This kind of thinking made a deep impression on Don Genarino's friends. The jailer at Genarino's prison had a young and pretty wife; she approached her husband's superior, reminding him that her husband had long been requesting repairs be done to the prison's exterior walls. The fact was well known, and there could be no doubt about it.

"Well then," the pretty wife continued, "Your Excellency could make use of this well-known fact to get us a gift of a thousand ducats, which would make our fortune. The friends of young Don Genarino de las Flores, who is in prison, suspected of having penetrated into the Convent of San Petito, where, as you know, the great lords of Naples have their mistresses, the great lords who are much more than suspected of such penetration—well, the friends of Don Genarino, you see, are offering a thousand ducats to my husband to let him escape. My husband will be put in prison for two weeks or maybe a month, and we are asking your protection to ensure that he is not fired and that he will get his position back again afterward."

The superior found granting such a request eminently reasonable, and he consented. And this was not the only service the prisoner's friends did for him. They all had relatives in the Convent of San Petito; they redoubled their affection for their relatives, and in doing so, they were able to keep Don Genarino perfectly informed about everything concerning Sister Scolastica. Their good offices led up to a

stormy night, toward one o'clock in the morning, when the winds were at their most furious and the rain threatened to drown the city of Naples; at this moment, Genarino exited his prison quite simply, walking out through the door while the jailer was busy wrecking the outer terrace, so that it would be assumed he had escaped through that route. Don Genarino, accompanied by just one man—a Spanish deserter, fearless, who in Naples made it his profession to lend aid to young men in their more scabrous enterprises—Don Genarino, we were saying, taking advantage of the universal uproar caused by the wind and storm, and aided moreover by Beppo, whose friendship did not flag when it came to hazardous circumstances, made his way into the convent garden. Despite the frightful noise caused by the rain and the wind, the convent dogs sensed his presence and were quickly chasing him. If he had been alone, they would probably have succeeded in stopping him, for they were powerful dogs, but he and the Spanish deserter stood back to back and managed to kill two of them and wound the third. The howls of the wounded dog awoke one of the guards. It was in vain that Don Genarino offered him a purse and tried to make him see reason; the man was very religious, with a keen sense of hellfire, and did not lack for courage. In the struggle, he was wounded, and they gagged him with a handkerchief and tied him to a thick olive tree. These two combats had taken quite a bit of time, and now the storm was beginning to quiet, yet the most difficult task remained ahead of them: they had to get into the *vade in pace*. He found that the two lay sisters who were charged with going down once a day to deliver the bread and a pitcher of water that were allotted to Sister Scolastica had been, on this night, so frightened by the storm that they had bolted shut two huge, iron-framed doors that Genarino had hoped to open by picking the lock or by using a skeleton key. The

Spanish deserter was very agile when it came to climbing walls, and he helped Genarino get up on the top of a pavilion that stood over the rock-hewn *in pace* of the Convent of San Petito.

The terror of the two lay sisters was not lessened when they suddenly saw descending from the upper story these two men covered in mud, who threw themselves upon them, gagging and tying them. All that remained now was to penetrate the *in pace*, but this was no easy task. Genarino had taken a huge ring of keys from the lay sisters, but there were several cells locked with trapdoors, and the two lay sisters refused to indicate which one held Sister Scolastica confined. The Spaniard had taken out his dagger to prick them and force them to talk, but Genarino, who knew Scolastica's sweet and gentle character, was afraid of displeasing her by such violence. The Spaniard kept on saying, "Signor, we are losing time, and soon we will have to start shedding blood anyway," but Genarino obstinately continued trying one key after another on one door after another, always calling out for Scolastica. At last, after three-quarters of an hour of fruitless labor, he heard a feeble "Deo Gratias" in response to his cries. Don Genarino hurried down a winding stair of eighty steps cut out of the soft rock, a narrow and steep pathway. Sister Scolastica had not seen a light in thirty-seven days, since the confrontation ceremony with Genarino, and she was blinded by the little lamp the Spaniard was carrying. She could understand nothing of what was happening to her; eventually, when she recognized Don Genarino, covered with mud and stained with blood, she fainted in his arms. This frightened the young man.

"There is no time to lose!" cried the more experienced Spaniard.

They both picked up the fainted Sister Scolastica, carrying her up

the rough, half-destroyed winding steps. It was the Spaniard who had the clever idea, once they were back in the little room with the two lay sisters, of covering Scolastica—who had only barely come out of her faint—with a great gray cloak they found there. They opened the doors that led to the garden. The Spaniard went first, with his sword in his hand. Genarino followed, supporting Scolastica, but they could hear a great noise ahead that augured ill: soldiers. The Spaniard had wanted to kill the guard, but Genarino rejected the idea with horror.

“But Excellency, we are in a condition of sacrilege now that we have broken into the cloister, and we’re condemned to death even more surely than we would be if we had killed him. This man can ruin us; we have to sacrifice him.”

But no argument would convince Genarino. Now, the man had loosened the ropes holding him and had gone to awaken the other guards and to send for soldiers posted on the Via Toledo.

“It’s not going to be easy getting out of here,” the Spaniard exclaimed, “and even harder with the lady! Your Excellency should have listened when I told you we needed at least one more man.”

At the sound of their voices, the soldiers rushed up to them; the Spaniard dispatched the first with the tip of his sword while the second lowered his rifle to take aim, but the branch of a bush got in his way, giving the Spaniard time to kill him, too. But this last soldier cried out for help before dying. Genarino made his way forward, supporting Scolastica, escorted by the Spaniard. Genarino began to run, and the Spaniard made a number of sword thrusts at the soldiers whenever they came too near. Fortunately, at this point the rain began to pour again in torrents, a favorable situation, but it happened that a

soldier who had been wounded by the Spaniard got off a pistol shot, grazing Genarino in the left arm. Hearing the shot, eight or ten soldiers now charged them from across the garden.

We assert that Genarino showed great bravery in this battle, but it was the Spanish deserter who showed himself to have great military talents.

“We have more than twenty soldiers against us; the slightest error and we are done for. As our accomplice, the lady will be sentenced to death by poison; she will never be able to prove she was not in on the plot with Your Excellency. I’m familiar with situations like this. We have to hide her in the undergrowth, get her down on the ground, and cover her with the mantle. Then, you and I can try to draw the soldiers to the other end of the garden, and once we’re there, we can pretend that we’ve got away over the wall; after that, we can come back here and try to save the lady.”

“I don’t want to leave you,” Scolastica said to Genarino; “I’m not afraid, and I would be truly happy to die with you.”

These were the first words she had spoken.

“I can walk,” she added.

But she was interrupted by a pistol shot just two feet away from her, though it harmed no one. Genarino took her in his arms; she was thin and light, and it was easy to pick her up and carry her. Lightning illuminated twelve or fifteen soldiers off on the left. He began to run rapidly to the right, and it was a good thing that he acted quickly, because suddenly a dozen rifle shots rang out, shattering a small olive tree.

Second Manuscript: March 19, 1842

P L A N

The Duke de Vargas continued to think about the disappearance of the unfortunate Rosalinde.⁹ He had made some inquiries but without success, because he did not know that she had taken the name Sister Scolastica. The day of his birthday fete arrived. On that day, his palazzo was opened and he received all the officers of his acquaintance. All those military men in full uniform were startled to see arriving in the first antechamber a woman who appeared to be a lay sister but who evidently did not wish to be recognized, wearing her long black veil, which gave her the appearance of a widow in the process of accomplishing some act of penance. When the duke's lackeys attempted to shoo her away, she fell to her knees, drew a long rosary out of her pocket, and began murmuring her prayers. She stayed like that until the first valet de chambre came and took her by the arm; then she showed him a large, beautiful diamond, and she spoke:

"I swear by the Virgin that I am not here to ask for any sort of alms from His Excellency. The duke will know by this diamond the name of the person on whose part I am here today."

All this excited the greatest possible curiosity on the duke's part, and he hurried to finish with the three or four persons of the greatest rank with whom he was speaking, and then, with the noblest and most truly Spanish graciousness, he asked the lower-ranking officers if they would permit him to see the poor and entirely unknown nun ahead of them.

Almost as soon as the duke and the sister were alone in his office, she went down on her knees.

“Poor Sister Scolastica has fallen into the deepest state of misery; the whole world seems to have turned against her. She charged me with placing this fine ring in Your Excellency’s hands. She says that you will know the person who gave it to her, in happier days. You may, with the help of this person, obtain permission to come and see Sister Scolastica, but, because she finds herself in the *in pace della morte*, you will need to get permission from monsignor the archbishop.”

The duke did recognize the ring, and despite his advanced age, he was so beside himself that he had trouble speaking at all.

“Tell me the name, the name of the convent where Rosalinde is being held.”

“San Petito.”

“I shall respect and obey the orders of the one who has sent you.”

“I would be ruined,” the lay sister added, “if my message were so much as suspected by the superiors.”

The duke cast his eye quickly on his desk and picked up a miniature portrait of the king, encircled with diamonds:

“Never let yourself be separated from this sacred portrait, which gives you the right to an audience with His Majesty. Here is a purse for you to bring to the person you call Sister Scolastica. And here is a little sum for yourself; and you may always count on my protection.”

The good sister paused to count out on the table the pieces of gold in the purse.

“Hurry back as quickly as you can to the poor Rosalinde. Don’t take the time to count—and now that I think of it, we must keep you hidden. My valet will have you leave by a door in my garden, and one of my carriages will then take you to the opposite side of the town; be sure to remain out of sight. Do everything you possibly can to return

to my garden at Arenella tomorrow at two o'clock. There, I am sure of my men; there, they are all Spanish."

The mortal pallor on the duke's visage when he returned to the officers was a sufficient excuse for his behavior.

"Something has come up, gentlemen, that requires me to leave for a time; I will not have the honor of thanking and receiving you until tomorrow morning at seven."

The Duke de Vargas hurried to the royal palazzo; the queen shed tears when she recognized the ring she had once given to the young Rosalinde. The queen took the duke into the king's quarters. The duke's overwhelmed air moved the king, who, like the great prince that he was, was the first to suggest some reasonable advice:

"We must be careful not to arouse the suspicions of the cardinal, in case the poor sister, despite the talisman of my portrait, has managed to escape his spies. I understand now why the cardinal has gone to stay at his country home of *****."

"If Your Majesty will permit me, I will go to the port and put an embargo on all ships leaving for *****. Everyone who is on board those ships will be escorted to the Castel dell'Ovo."

"Go, and then come back here," the king said to him. "These extraordinary measures will raise talk that is not suited to the taste of Tanucci (the first minister of Don Carlos),¹⁰ but I will say nothing to him about this affair; he already is only too angry with the cardinal."

The Duke de Vargas gave orders to his aide-de-camp, and when he returned, the queen had fainted and the king was trying to revive her. This princess, who had so good a heart, had thought that if the lay sister had been seen coming into the duke's residence, Rosalinde

would already be poisoned and dead. The duke calmed the queen's anxieties.

"Fortunately, the cardinal is not in Naples, and, given the sirocco outside, now it would take at least two hours to get to *****. The canon Cybo, who is the cardinal's alter ego when he is out of Naples, is a man severe to the point of cruelty, but even he would scruple to order an execution without his superior's express command."

"I am going to sow some confusion in the archbishop's government," said the king, "by calling Canon Cybo here to the palace and keeping him until evening; during his Sunday audience, he was asking me to grant a pardon to his nephew, who has recently killed a peasant."

The king went into the next room to give his orders.

The queen asked Vargas, "Duke, are you sure you can save Rosalinde?"

"With a man like the archbishop, I am not sure of anything."

"So, Tanucci was right in trying to rid us of the man by getting him named a cardinal."

"Yes," said the duke, "but it was necessary to make him ambassador to Rome, and in that capacity he can do us even more harm than in the past."

The king having returned after this exchange, the three of them entered into a long deliberation, which ended in the duke's obtaining permission to go immediately to the Convent of San Petito to learn news, in the name of the queen, concerning the young Rosalinde, Princess d'Atella, who was said to be held in the dungeon. Before going to the convent, the duke made a point of stopping to see Princess Dona Ferdinanda, to tell her of the danger facing her stepdaughter.

The anxiety of the Duke de Vargas would not permit him to prolong his visit to the d'Atella palazzo as long as he would have liked.

The duke sensed that there was some strange preoccupation in the air at the Convent of San Petito, evident even with the lay sister who opened the first exterior door. Coming in the name of the queen, the duke had the right to be admitted without delay to the abbess, Angela de Castropignano. But now he was made to wait, for twenty long minutes. The duke feared he would never again see the beautiful Rosalinde.

When the abbess appeared at last, she seemed to be extremely agitated. The duke now changed his message to her:

"Prince d'Atella had an apoplectic attack last night.¹¹ He is not doing well, and he insists upon seeing his daughter Rosalinde before he dies, and he has solicited Her Majesty for the necessary order to take Signora Rosalinde away from the convent. Out of respect for the privileges of this noble house, the king wanted to send no less a person than myself, his first chamberlain, to deliver the order."

At this, the abbess fell to her knees before the Duke de Vargas.

"I will answer personally for my disobedience to the apparent royal command. The position in which you see me, Signor Duke, is a striking witness of my respect for you and for the dignity of your role."

"She is dead!" cried the duke. "But by San Genaro, I will see her!"

The duke was so beside himself that he drew his sword, opened the door, and called his aide-de-camp, who had stayed in the outer parlor of the abbess.

"Draw your sword, Duke d'Atri; and call in my two dragoons; this is a matter of life and death. The king has charged me with arresting the young Princess Rosalinde."

The abbess Angela got up and began to flee.

"No, madame," cried the duke; "the only way you will leave my side is when I deliver you to the prison of San Elmo. There is a conspiracy here."

In his immense anxiety, the duke sought to formulate excuses for violating the sacred cloister. He said to himself, "If the abbess refuses to take me to her, and if these drawn swords and my two dragoons don't frighten her, I'm lost; this convent is so vast that it's like a world of its own."

Fortunately, the duke was holding the wrist of the abbess tightly and now saw that she was trying to lead him; she took him down a huge staircase leading to an enormous room that was half underground. The duke, believing this was partial success and seeing that there was no one else around, and hearing the footsteps of the Duke d'Atri and his two dragoons as their heavy boots resounded on the stairs, thought it best to burst out now with angry threats. Soon, they arrived at the dark room of which we have already spoken, illuminated by four candles upon an altar. Two sisters, still young, were lying on the floor, apparently dying as they convulsed from the effects of poison; three others, about twenty paces away, were on their knees to their confessors. The canon Cybo, seated in a large chair placed against the altar, seemed impassive though he was very pale; two tall young men placed behind him were lowering their heads in an attempt not to look at the two nuns lying at the foot of the altar; their long, dark green silk robes twitched as the women convulsed.

After quickly scanning the scene and all the people present, the duke was thrilled to see Rosalinde sitting on a straw-backed chair some six paces behind the three confessors. Out of an extraordinary impudence, he approached her and asked, using the familiar *tù*:

"Have you taken poison?"

"No, and I will not take it," she replied in a firm tone; "I do not wish to imitate those two reckless women."

"Signora, you are saved; I will take you to the queen."

At this, the abbé Cybo spoke from his armchair, saying, "I dare to trust, Signor Duke, that you will not forget the presidial rights enjoyed by monsignor the archbishop."

The duke, understanding what it was that he had to deal with now, went over and knelt at the altar, saying to the abbé Cybo:

"Signor Canon and grand vicar, according to the recent concordat, sentences such as these can be passed only with the king's signature."

The abbé Cybo replied rapidly and bitterly:

"Signor the duke is acting quite rashly here: the sinners you see before you have been legally condemned, convicted of sacrilege, but the church has inflicted no punishment upon them. I suppose, after what you have just said to me and based on appearances, that you think these wretches have been poisoned."

The Duke de Vargas heard only about half of what the abbé Cybo was saying, for he was drowned out by the voice of the Duke d'Attri, kneeling beside the two sisters convulsing on the paving stones, their severe pain making them unaware of their own movements. One of them seemed to have become delirious, a very fine-looking woman of around thirty; she was tearing at the robe over her chest, crying out:

"To me! Me! A woman of my birth!"

The duke got up, and with that same perfect grace he had shown in the apartments of the queen, he returned to Rosalinde:

"Signora, are you absolutely sure that your health is intact?"

"I have taken no poison, Signor Duke, and I am able to understand that I owe you my life."

"I can claim no merit in this," the duke replied. "The king had heard something from his faithful subjects, and he called me and told me that some kind of conspiracy was afoot in the convent. It was necessary to arrest the conspirators. And now," he added, looking directly at Rosalinde, "all that remains is to follow your orders. Will you go and thank the queen, signora?"

Rosalinde arose and took the duke's arm as they walked toward the staircase. When they came to the door, the duke said to Duke d'Atri:

"I charge you with locking up Cybo and the two men with him. You will also put signora the abbess Angela under lock and key. You will then go down into the dungeons and bring out all the prisoners. Lock them up somewhere separate from these people who have attempted to go against the orders of His Majesty. His Majesty wishes for all who desire an audience with him to be taken to the palace. Lock up the people here in separate rooms quickly. I will then send doctors and a battalion of the guard to you."

He then signed to the Duke d'Atri that he wished to speak privately to him. Standing by the staircase, he said:

"You understand, my dear duke, that Cybo and the abbess must not be allowed to prepare their answers together. Within five minutes, you will have a battalion of the guard here under your command, and you should place a sentinel at every one of the doors that lead to the street or to the garden. Anyone wishing to leave may do so, but do not let anyone enter. Search the gardens; all the conspirators, including the gardeners, should be jailed in separate rooms. And tend to the poor women who have been poisoned."

Suora Scolastica

P R E F A C E

In Naples, where I found myself in 1824, I heard people alluding to the story of Suora Scolastica and Canon Cybo.¹² Being the curious type, I asked questions, but nobody would give me a clear answer: they were all afraid of being compromised.

In Naples, no one ever speaks directly about politics. And there is a good reason: a Neapolitan family, composed, for example, of three sons, a daughter, a father, and a mother, would belong to three different parties—or what in Naples are called conspiracies. Thus, the daughter is attached to the party of her beloved; each of the sons belongs to a different conspiracy; and the father and mother sigh and speak only of the court as it was when they were twenty years old. Given all this isolation of each from each, the result is that there is little serious political discussion. When a remark with even the slightest boldness about it is heard, you can look around and see two or three faces going pale. My questions regarding this story with the baroque name having encountered no success, I assumed that the story of Suora Scolastica must be some terrible set of events that happened in, perhaps, 1820. A widow, forty years of age but still a beauty, and a good sort of woman as well, rented me one-half of her small house, situated on a little street a hundred steps from the charming Chiaja Public Gardens, at the foot of the hill crowned by the villa of Princess Florida, wife of the old king. It is perhaps the only really quiet neighborhood in Naples.

My widow had an old admirer, and I paid court to him all week long. One day, when we were walking about the town together, and

as I was being shown the places where the Lazzaroni were battered by General Championnet and the crossroads where the Duke of *** was burned alive,¹³ I turned and abruptly asked him simply and directly why people made such a mystery out of the story of Suora Scolastica and Canon Cybo.

He calmly replied, “The titles of duke and prince, titles attached to the individuals involved in that story, are today attached to their descendants, and it could be that they would be annoyed to see their names mentioned for the whole world to read in a story as tragic and sad as this one.”

“So this story did not take place in 1820?”

“What? The year 1820?” my Neapolitan asked, laughing out loud at the idea of such a recent date. “What are you saying—1820?” He repeated it with that rather impolite vivacity that is common in Italy but would be shocking to a Frenchman in Paris.

“If you want to be sensible,” he went on, “you should say 1745, the year following the battle of Velletri, when our great Don Carlos was put in possession of Naples. In this country, he is called Charles VII, and a little later, in Spain, where he accomplished great things, they called him Charles III. He is the one who introduced the big nose of the Farnese into our royal family.¹⁴

“Nowadays, it is better not to use the real name of that archbishop who once made all of Naples tremble until he was distressed in turn by the fatal name of Velletri. The Germans camped on the mountain around Velletri tried to surprise our great Don Carlos in the Ginetti palazzo, where he lived.

“It was a monk who is said to have written down the anecdote you mention. The young nun people call Suora Scolastica belonged to the family of the Duke of Bisignano.¹⁵ That same writer revealed a

passionate hatred for the archbishop, a real politician who got deeply involved in the Canon Cybo affair. The monk, perhaps, was a protégé of the young Don Genarino, the Marquis of Las Flores, who, they say, was a rival to Don Carlos himself—an amorous king, he was—for the hand of Rosalinde, which was also being sought by the old Duke Vargas del Pardo, who was said to be the wealthiest man of his time. There were undoubtedly some things in the history of this catastrophe that could have given profound offense to someone who was still powerful in 1750, which is roughly when the monk wrote it down, because he was careful not to be too direct. The verbiage he uses is amazing: he often expresses himself in universal maxims, which are no doubt morally perfect but which tell us nothing whatsoever. Often, one has to set the manuscript aside for a time in order to reflect on what it was that the good monk wanted to say. For example, when he gets to the death of Don Genarino, you can barely understand what he is trying to convey.

“Over the next few days, I could perhaps bring you the manuscript, for it’s so frustrating that I cannot advise you to buy it. Two years ago, it sold for less than four ducats from the library of the notary B***.”

A week later, I was in possession of this manuscript, which is in fact perhaps the most frustrating one in the whole world. At every turn, the author starts up in different terms the very story he has just finished telling; and at first, the unfortunate reader believes that it’s a question of some new fact. In the end, the confusion is so great that one cannot make anything of it.

It is important to note that in 1842, a Milanese and a Neapolitan, two men who in their entire lives had never spoken more than a few words of the Florentine dialect, thought it wise to use exactly that

foreign tongue when they published. The excellent General Colletta, the greatest historian of the century,¹⁶ was somewhat addicted to this same folly, and he often annoyed his reader as a result.

The terrible manuscript titled "Suora Scolastica" is some 310 pages. I recall that I copied out certain pages of it in order to be sure of the meaning.

Once I had informed myself as to the anecdote, I took care not to ask any direct questions. After having proven, by means of lengthy conversation, that I was fully aware of a fact, I would ask for certain clarifications with an air of complete indifference.

Some time after that, one of the important people who, two months earlier, had refused to answer my questions now procured a short manuscript of sixty pages for me, which provides some picturesque details about certain facts, though without entering directly into the main story. This manuscript furnished me with some genuine details concerning the insane jealousy.

It was from the lips of her chaplain that the princess Donna Ferdinanda de Bisignano learned all at once that she was not the one whom the young Don Genarino was in love with, but, on the contrary, that it was her stepdaughter Rosalinde.

She took vengeance on her rival, who she believed was loved by the king, Don Carlos, inspiring a hideous jealousy in Don Genarino de Las Flores.

March 21, 1842

Sister Scolastica

CHAPTER 1

You know that in 1711, Louis XIV, deprived of the great men who had been born at the same time as him and besotted by Madame de Maintenon, had so insane a pride as to send a child to reign over Spain, the Duke d'Anjou, later Philippe V, who was mad, brave, and pious.¹⁷ As foreigners told him, it would have been much wiser to try to reunite France with Belgium and Milan.

France had its troubles, but its king, who up until now had experienced only easy victories and a theatrical renown, now showed true grandeur in adversity. The victory at Denain and the famous glass of water spilled on the dress of the Duchess of Marlborough led to a glorious peace for France.¹⁸

Around this time, Philip V, on the Spanish throne, lost the queen, his wife. This event, together with his monastic character, nearly drove him mad. In that state of mind, he found, by dint of searching in an attic in Parma, Elisabeth Farnese and brought her to Spain to marry her.¹⁹ This great queen showed a kind of genius in the midst of all those arrogant Spanish childish tantrums which have since been so widely celebrated in Europe and which, under the venerable heading of Spanish etiquette, have been imitated by all the thrones of Europe.

This queen, Elisabeth Farnese, spent fifteen years of her life without ever letting her madman of a husband out of her sight for more than ten minutes a day. This court, a miserable one despite its artificial grandeurs, found its most brilliant painter in a man of genius, one able to see the depths of all those childish intrigues that the somber

Spanish character produces, the Duke of Saint-Simon, the first great French historian.²⁰ He provides the curious details of all the efforts that the queen, Elisabeth Farnese, made to be able to send off a Spanish army to conquer someplace so that one of the younger children she gave to Philip V could reign over it. The children that the king had had with his first wife were complete imbeciles, as you would expect of legitimate princes brought up under the Holy Inquisition. One of the favorites who would rule over whichever one of the two would become king might well have found it both necessary and wise to put Elisabeth Farnese in prison, for her good, strong sense, together with her activity, was offensive to Spanish indolence. Don Carlos, the eldest son of Queen Elisabeth, came to Italy in 17***. The battle of Bitonto, easily won by *****, put him on the throne of Naples, but in 174*, Austria attacked.²¹ On August 10, 1744, he found himself in the little town of Velletri, a dozen leagues from Rome, with a small Spanish army. He was at the base of Monte Artemisio, only a couple of leagues from a small Austrian army that was better situated than his.

On the fourteenth of August, at dawn, Don Carlos was surprised in his chamber by a party of Austrians. Duke Vargas del Pardo, whom the queen had ordered to accompany her son despite the efforts of the head chaplain, grabbed him by the legs and boosted him out of the window, which stood about ten feet above the ground, while Austrian grenadiers were beating down the door with their rifle butts and calling out, as respectfully as possible, for the prince to surrender himself.

Vargas leaped out of the window after his prince, found two horses, got him up on one of them, and raced off to the infantry, which was encamped a quarter of a league away.

“Your prince will be lost,” he said to the Spanish troops, “if you do not immediately remember that you are Spaniards; you need to kill about two thousand of those Austrian heretics who are trying to make a prisoner out of the son of your good queen.”

These few words were all it took to reignite Spanish valor; they began by cutting down the four companies they found at Velletri, where they tried to surprise the prince. Fortunately, Vargas found an old general, who, despite the absurd way they fought wars in 1744, avoided extinguishing the fury of the brave Spanish troops by forcing them into overly clever maneuvers. At the battle of Velletri, they dispatched some thirty-five hundred men of the Austrian army, after which Don Carlos was truly the king of Naples.

The Farnese queen sent one of her favorites to tell Don Carlos, whose only well-known passion was for hunting, that the Austrians should be seen as especially intolerable to the people of Naples because of their stinginess and their avarice.

“Spend a few more millions than are really necessary on these Neapolitans; they are always defiant but also always preoccupied with the affairs of the moment; keep them amused with their money, but do not be a mere log king.”²²

Don Carlos, though he had been raised by priests and was steeped in all the rituals of church and court, surprisingly turned out not to be lacking in intelligence; he attracted a brilliant court around him; he sought to bind the young lords to him with special favors, the ones who had left school only since his arrival in Naples and who had been no more than twenty at the time of the battle of Velletri. Many of these young people fought at Velletri and were surprised to find that their king, who was the same age as they were, was not made prisoner. The king took advantage of all the conspiracies and attempts that the

Austrians put in play. His judges declared all the fools who supported Austria infamous traitors.

Don Carlos did not have any of their death sentences carried out, but he did accept the confiscation of many fine estates; the Neapolitan spirit, which is naturally drawn to everything that is sumptuous and brilliant, led the courtiers to understand that if they wanted to please this young king, it was going to take a great deal of expense. The king let all the lords that his minister Tanucci told him were secretly devoted to Austria run themselves into financial ruin. He was thwarted only by Acquaviva, the archbishop of Naples and the only really dangerous enemy that Don Carlos found in his new kingdom.

The balls that Don Carlos gave in the winter of 1745, after the battle of Velletri, were truly magnificent, and they gained him the love of the Neapolitans as much as his victory in war did. Tranquillity and peace were suddenly everywhere. When the day of the great gala and *baisemain*²³ celebrating his birthday arrived, Charles III handed out fine estates to the nobles he believed were most loyal to him. In private, Don Carlos ridiculed the archbishop's mistresses and some older women who missed the ridiculous Austrian regime. The king distributed two or three ducal titles to young nobles who he knew had been spending more than their income, for Don Carlos, who was naturally grand, had a horror of people who followed the Austrian principle of pinching their pennies.

The young king had wit and elevated sentiments, and was very much his mother's son. She loved regal fetes, and she readily accustomed herself to the taxes being distributed back among the young people for their amusement rather than being hauled off every six months to Madrid or Austria. It was in vain that the archbishop, supported by all the old men and by all the women who were no longer

young, insinuated in all his sermons that the style of life exhibited at the court was an abomination, for every time that the king or the queen came out of the palace, the people burst out in joyful cheers, so robust they could be heard a quarter of a league away. How can one describe it, such cries from a people who are prone to shouting and who now found themselves genuinely happy?

CHAPTER 2

That winter following the battle of Velletri, many nobles from the French court came to Naples, nominally for their health's sake, and they were welcomed at the castle; the wealthiest Neapolitans made it a duty to invite them to all their parties, the ancient Spanish solemnity and the rigors of ceremony—which entirely prohibited paying morning visits to young ladies, as well as entirely prohibiting the latter from receiving young men without the presence of two or three duennas chosen by their husbands—seeming to relax a bit in the presence of French customs. Eight or ten women of exceptional beauty seemed to share most of the male attention, but the young king insisted that the most beautiful creature in his court was young Rosalinde, daughter of Prince d'Atella. This prince, in the past an Austrian general, was a somber, prudent man closely allied with the archbishop, and in the four years of Don Carlos's reign since the battle of Velletri, he had not once visited the castle. The king had not laid eyes upon Prince d'Atella except for two obligatory *baisemain* days—namely, the king's name day and birthday. But the charming parties given by the king made partisans of him even within families the most devoted to Austrian rights (as they said in those days in Naples). Prince d'Atella,

despite himself, had given in to the importuning of his second wife, Ferdinanda, permitting her to appear at the castle and to be followed there by her daughter, that beautiful Rosalinde who had been proclaimed the most beautiful creature in his kingdom by Don Carlos. Prince d'Atella had three sons by his first wife, and getting them established in society gave him a great deal of worry, because the titles these sons bore, all dukes or princes, seemed to him too imposing for the mediocre fortune that he would be able to leave them. These worries were only worsened when, on the occasion of the queen's birthday, the king made many promotions of sublieutenants among his troops; the sons of d'Atella were not included, for the simple reason that they had not asked for anything. But young Rosalinde, their sister, had accompanied her stepmother on a visit that the latter made the day after the gala; the queen said to Rosalinde that she had noticed during the card games that Rosalinde had no pledge to bet with.

"Though young girls do not wear diamonds," she said to her, "I trust that as a pledge of friendship from your queen, and by my express command, you will be willing to wear this ring."

And the queen gave her a ring with a diamond worth many hundreds of ducats.

This ring was a cruel object of embarrassment for the old prince d'Atella; his friend the archbishop threatened to have all the priests in his diocese refuse absolution at Eastertime to his daughter Rosalinde if she wore that Spanish ring. On the advice of his old chaplain, the prince offered the archbishop a *mezzo termine*: he would have a ring made himself, using one of his own diamonds from the entail and looking as like the other ring as possible. This greatly irritated Donna Ferdinanda.

Irritated by this subtraction from her own jewelry box, she insisted

that the queen's diamond should replace it. The prince, supported in this by one of his duennas, argued that putting Rosalinde's ring into the entail collection might, after his death, deprive Rosalinde of ownership, and if the queen were to discover the substitution, it would mean his daughter could not swear on the blood of San Gennaro²⁴ that the ring had always been in her possession, which she could otherwise prove simply by coming to her father's palazzo. This disagreement, which did not much interest Rosalinde, troubled the rest of the house for two weeks. Finally, and again upon the counsel of the old chaplain, the queen's ring was deposited in the keeping of old Litta, the most senior of the duennas.

The mania that characterizes most noble Neapolitan families of regarding themselves as independent princes with opposed interests means that there is no real affection between brother and sister, and that their interests are always settled by means of the strictest political protocols.

In 1741, all Naples knew a young courtier called *Il Francese*; he was a gay, scatterbrained young man who nonetheless became friends with all the young French nobles who visited Italy. The king favored him, because this prince would never forget the fact that if the French court were to change its tone from that insouciant lightness which seemed to govern everything it did, it could, with the slightest show of force on the Rhine, attract the attention of that all-powerful Austria, which was always threatening to swallow up Naples. We will not disguise the fact that the king's favor, while very real, also tended to encourage the frivolity in Don Genarino's character.

One day, while he was out walking on the Madeleine Bridge, the main road to Vesuvius, with the Marquis de Charot, who had come from Versailles only two months earlier, these two young men took it

into their heads to go visit the hermit's house located about halfway up the side of Vesuvius. Going up on foot was impracticable, because it was already very hot, and sending a lackey back to Naples to get horses would take too long. Just then, Don Genarino saw a domestic on horseback about a hundred paces from them; he did not recognize the man's livery, and he approached him, complimenting him on the beauty of the Andalusian horse he was leading by the bridle.

"Give my compliments to your master, and tell him that he has given us these two horses so we can go up to the hermit's house. In two hours, they will be back at your master's house, and one of the servants of the house of Las Flores²⁵ will be declaring my thanks."

The servant on horseback turned out to be an old Spanish soldier; he looked at Don Genarino with dislike and made no move to dismount. Don Genarino pulled him by the tail of his jacket and grabbed hold of his shoulder so that he did not fall but came down, and at the same time Don Genarino lightly leaped up into the saddle, and he offered the magnificent Andalusian horse they had been leading to the Marquis de Charot. Just as the latter got up into the saddle, Don Genarino, who had been holding the horse by the bridle, felt the cold steel of a dagger brush his left arm.

It was the old Spanish servant, who was thus indicating his displeasure at the sudden change of route imposed on the two horses.

Don Genarino called to him with his customary gaiety, "Tell your master that I offer him my compliments, and that within two hours one of the men from the stables of Las Flores will bring back his two horses, which we will be careful not to tire overmuch. This charming Andalusian will provide a fine ride for my friend."

As the furious servant approached Don Genarino to give him a second stab of the dagger, the two young men galloped off, laughing.

Two hours after returning from Vesuvius, Don Genarino had one of his father's groomsmen find out the name of the owner of the two horses and return them along with his compliments and his thanks. An hour later, the groomsman returned looking very pale and reporting to Don Genarino that the horses belonged to the cardinal archbishop, who had him say that he did not accept the compliments of this impudent person.

In a few days, this little incident had become a major affair, with all Naples talking about the archbishop's rage. There was a ball at the court, and Don Genarino, always eager for a dance, was there as usual; he gave his arm to Princess Ferdinanda d'Atella and was walking with her and her stepdaughter Rosalinde through the various salons when the king summoned him.

"Tell me the story about this latest escapade of yours with the two horses you borrowed from the archbishop."

After briefly narrating the adventure that the reader has already seen, Don Genarino added:

"I didn't recognize the livery, but I was sure the horses belonged to one of my friends. The same thing happened to me once before. A year ago, I was on that same road to Vesuvius and I borrowed a horse belonging to the Baron de Salerne, who, even though he's much older than me, didn't stoop to being offended by such nonsense, because he's a man of wit and a real philosopher, as Your Majesty knows. Anyway, even if it's a matter of crossing swords for a moment, I sent my compliments, and, after all, if anybody should be offended, it's me by his refusing to receive them, which is what the archbishop did. My father's groom insists that the horses don't really belong to His Eminence, who's never even made use of them."

"Well, I forbid you to do anything further about this affair," the

king replied with a severe air. "I do permit you to send your compliments again to see if His Eminence is good enough to accept them now."

Two days later, the affair became even more serious, as the cardinal archbishop claimed that the king had talked about him in such a way as to lead the young courtiers to mock him openly. At the same time, Princess d'Atella vigorously took the side of the handsome young man who had danced with her at all the balls; she argued that he had not recognized the livery worn by the servant who was leading the horses. And by some chance that no one could explain, one of Don Genarino's servants was able to prove that it was not that of the archbishop.

At this point, Don Genarino was far from refusing to discuss the matter with the owner, who was so ill humored as to be angry with him. He was inclined even to go tell the archbishop that he would feel real remorse if the horses he borrowed so readily were proved to belong to him.

All this was a serious embarrassment to King Don Carlos. The archbishop saw to it that all the priests in Naples were making it known via their confessionals that the young men of the court had given themselves up to an impious mode of life and were seeking opportunities to affront the livery of the archbishop.

One morning, the king went to the royal palace in Portici; he had secretly summoned there that same Baron de Salerne whom Don Genarino had mentioned in his first response to the king. This was a rich and powerful man who had the reputation of being one of the finest wits of the country; he was very wicked and seemed to seize every opportunity he could to speak ill of the king's government. He subscribed to the Paris journal *Le Mercure Galant*, a fact that

confirmed his reputation for genius. He was strongly allied to the cardinal archbishop, who in fact had stood godfather to his son. Parenthetically, this son took seriously the liberal sentiments that his father affected, to the point of being hanged for them in 1792. But in the period of our story, the Baron de Salerne saw the king under cover of the greatest of secrecy and informed him about a great many things. The king consulted him often concerning those acts which would be most appreciated by the higher levels of society in Naples. The next day, following the baron's advice, word spread throughout Naples that a young relative of the cardinal who lived at the arch episcopal palace had heard, to his great terror, that Don Genarino was just as good with swords as he was at other exercises and that he had already proved this in three different encounters that, in general, ended very poorly for his adversaries and that, as a result of deep reflection on these sad truths, the young relative of the archbishop, whose courage was not the equal of his high birth, after having been so sensitive as to get angry about the borrowing of the horses, had had the prudence of declaring that they belonged to his uncle.

That very evening, Don Genarino went to declare to the cardinal archbishop that he would have felt the greatest remorse if it had been proved that the horses did belong to him.

By the end of the week, the relative of the cardinal, whose name was well known, was so covered in ridicule that he left Naples. One month later, Don Genarino was made sublieutenant of the First Regiment of the guard, and the king, who appeared to think his fortune was not commensurate with his high birth, gave him three superb horses chosen from his own stud.

This mark of favor made quite an impact, because the king, Don Carlos, who was very generous, had the reputation of being stingy,

thanks to the gossip spread by the clergy. On this occasion, the archbishop was punished for the false stories he had caused to be spread, because the people now believed that a gentleman from an impoverished family had nonetheless overcome that poverty to become so useful to the secret designs of the king that this very king had overcome his stinginess and had made a gift to the young man of three horses of the rarest beauty. The archbishop's reputation had the worst of it. The archbishop reflected that any accident that might befall Don Genarino now would only augment his celebrity, and he resolved to put off his vengeance for a more favorable occasion; but because that enraged soul could not live without doing something to relieve the bitterness he felt, every confessional in Naples was ordered to spread the gossip that at the battle of Velletri, the king had shown no courage at all and that, on the contrary, everything that happened was the result of the Duke Vargas del Pardo's actions and that the latter, with the violence and brusqueness that everyone recognized in his character, had virtually forced the king to escape from the dangers that surrounded him. The king, who was not a hero, was extremely sensitive to this new calumny that seemed to be repeated endlessly in Naples. Don Genarino's new status of favorite seemed suddenly in doubt. If it had not been for the bad joke about borrowing horses from a stranger on the road to Vesuvius, which Don Genarino was imprudent enough to keep mentioning, no one would have thought of retelling the particulars of the morning of the battle of Velletri, which in fact the king had recalled all too often in his addresses to the troops.

The king ordered the young sublieutenant Don Genarino to go visit his stud farm at ***** and to report to him on the number of completely black horses there, for use in a new squadron of light cavalry for the queen.

The domestic tempests unleashed into the family of Prince d'Atella by Princess Ferdinanda's stubbornness had greatly irritated that old man, already irritable over the situation of his three sons and their lack of fortune. The story of the diamond borrowed from her jewelry collection and not replaced had likewise left the princess in ill humor, and because she supposed that her husband would not be angry to have his clerical friends believe that his hand had been forced by the extraordinary favor the young queen showed to his wife and that he wanted to take advantage of the incident to get the princess to solicit some employment for her stepsons, the princess profited from the first morning visit that Don Genarino paid to her, just after he had heard about his orders to go to the stud farm at *****. The princess, who had a real minor ailment which had kept her away from court for several days without seeing him, now declared she was indisposed. One of her goals was to go against her husband, who, in the affair of the ring given by the queen, had made a decision that was ultimately not in her favor: for although the princess was thirty-two—that is to say, thirty-six years younger than her husband—she still was able to entertain some hope of inspiring passion in the young Don Genarino. Though a bit stout, she was still pretty, but it was her personality that kept her seeming young: she was very gay, imprudent, and likely to become inflamed over the slightest thing if she thought that her high birth was not being properly respected. During the brilliant parties of that winter of 1740, she was always seen surrounded by the most brilliant people of the court at Naples; she singled out the young Don Genarino above them all, though, because he combined the noble and slightly haughty manners of a Spaniard with the most gracious and gay appearance. His way of behaving in a lively, familiar way, the French way, struck Princess Ferdinanda as especially deli-

cious for a descendant of one of the branches of the Medinaceli family who had been transplanted to Naples a mere 150 years earlier. Don Genarino's hair and mustache were a very attractive blond, and he had expressive blue eyes. The princess was above all charmed by this [*illegible word*], which seemed clear proof of descent from a Gothic family. She remembered often that Don Genarino, always as audacious and as bold as his Gothic ancestors, had twice been wounded by brothers or husbands from families into which he had imported disorder. Genarino, who had been rendered more prudent by these little incidents, almost never spoke directly to young Rosalinde, even though she was incessantly at her stepmother's side. But even though Genarino spoke to her only in those moments when her stepmother could not very well hear what he was saying, Rosalinde was nonetheless quite certain that she was beloved by this young man, and Genarino felt a pretty similar certainty about the feelings he was inspiring in her. It would be very difficult to explain to this France of ours, which likes to joke about everything, about the profound religious discretion with which feelings are shrouded in this kingdom of Naples, which has been subjected for 110 years to the whims and tyrannies of Spanish viceroys. Genarino, as he departed for the stud farm, vividly felt his cruel misfortune in being unable to speak even one word directly to Rosalinde. Not only was he jealous of the king, who was able to speak openly of his admiration for her, but beyond that, his extreme assiduity at the court had led him into a very well kept secret: that same Duke Vargas del Pardo who had once been so useful to Don Carlos on the day of the battle of Velletri had come to imagine that his enormous fortune of 200,000 piastres a year could make a young woman ignore his sixty-six years of age as well as the roughness of his personality; he had formed the project of asking

Prince d'Atella for his daughter's hand by offering to take it upon himself to settle fortunes upon her three stepbrothers. The duke, highly suspicious, as befits an aging Spaniard, was restrained in this scheme only by his love for the king, whose likely reaction to the matter was unclear. Would Don Carlos sacrifice everything to support a fantasy in order to stay closely allied to a favorite to whom he owed so much and who helped him with so many of the burdens of state, a favorite for whom thus far he had not hesitated to sacrifice every minister who in any way affronted the enormous pride of Vargas? Or could it be that the king was already vanquished by that combination of sweet melancholy with gaiety which defined Rosalinde's character—that he already was in love with her himself?

It was a similar uncertainty—about what might be the king's amorous feelings and those of Vargas del Pardo—that plunged young Genarino, traveling on his way to the stud farm, into an unhappiness deeper than anything he had ever experienced. It was only then that he fell into the doubts that accompany all real passions; it had been only three days since he had seen Rosalinde, but already he had come to doubt the one thing of which he had been so sure in Naples: the emotion he had been sure he could read in Rosalinde's eyes whenever she caught sight of him, and the vexation that she clearly felt whenever her stepmother showed those all too open signs of her violent passion for him.

PLAN

Develop the jealousy that brings Don Genarino to the end of his rope.²⁶

The archbishop Acquaviva promised a position for his canon in

the cathedral as chaplain to Prince Bissignano [that is, d'Atella], if he succeeds in persuading Princess Ferdinanda that Don Genarino is in love with Rosalinde. By these means, the archbishop will frustrate and distress Don Genarino, who is not a deep thinker.

Make it so that the style is simple, fitting the type of tale by word choice even: he wears a periwig, he takes snuff, etc.; make use of ideas like: at Naples, one often encounters eyes that accompany a magnificent figure, but those eyes, like those of Juno in Homer, communicate nothing. Eliminate everything that suggests the grand style, that *grandiosity* that deadens the heart, that throws things off; [it should have] a modest, natural, sensitive air, like German *bonhomie*.

The queen says:

"I advise you to marry as soon as possible, and once you have a husband, I will make you one of my waiting women. Once you are attached to me, the clergy will not dare do anything to you. Think about this: otherwise, you can expect all manner of persecutions. I don't want to plead the cause of our Vargas and influence you to marry him, but consider that you would be making the king and me very happy."

The king is angry about Vargas's having sent the battalion from the regiment of Bitonto to the gates of the noble Convent of San Petito.

"Since the goal was obtained, why make a scandal about the means?"

"The only excuse, for clergy so arrogant and attached to the court of Rome, to open the gate to an enemy from your estates was the accusation of flagrant conspiracy within the Convent of San Petito. As soon as I saw the severe expression and the cool gaze of that canon Cybo fixed upon me, I knew that I had to eliminate, at any price, the suspicion that we were there to liberate a novice. The presence of the

Bitonto battalion made an impression on everyone in Naples, even on the priests, and it suggested that there was an Austrian conspiracy.

"But," continues the king, "Tanucci was vigorously against it. Where could I find another minister as good, another who works as hard, another who has refused millions to Rome? Would you like to take his place?"

"I would not like to work that hard."

Duke Vargas takes care of the lay sister, keeping her safely hidden in Gênes under an assumed name.

Don Genarino experiences a fit of religiosity, like the beautiful Boca at Via Capo le Case.²⁷ Rosalinde is so greathearted that she returns to the convent. Don Genarino believes she is being persecuted by the Holy Virgin, cursed by the heavenly evil eye, and he is in despair over Rosalinde's refusal to give in to him before marriage out of her fear that Genarino is in a state of mortal sin.

Genarino, distressed by his suspicions, kills himself. This causes Rosalinde almost to go mad, and she now also believes she is being persecuted by the heavenly evil eye. A fanatic tries to murder her with a dagger.

She marries Vargas, who is now sixty-nine years old.

And on the condition that every year she will spend three months in the convent where Genarino killed himself. She weeps incessantly and is mad with despair the night before her wedding. "If Genarino can see me from his place in heaven, what must he think of me?"

Ultimately, make Genarino a bit ridiculous; otherwise, Rosalinde will have to kill herself after him.